This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

HW K9K3 F

Alexandre Dumas

41529
07.2.3

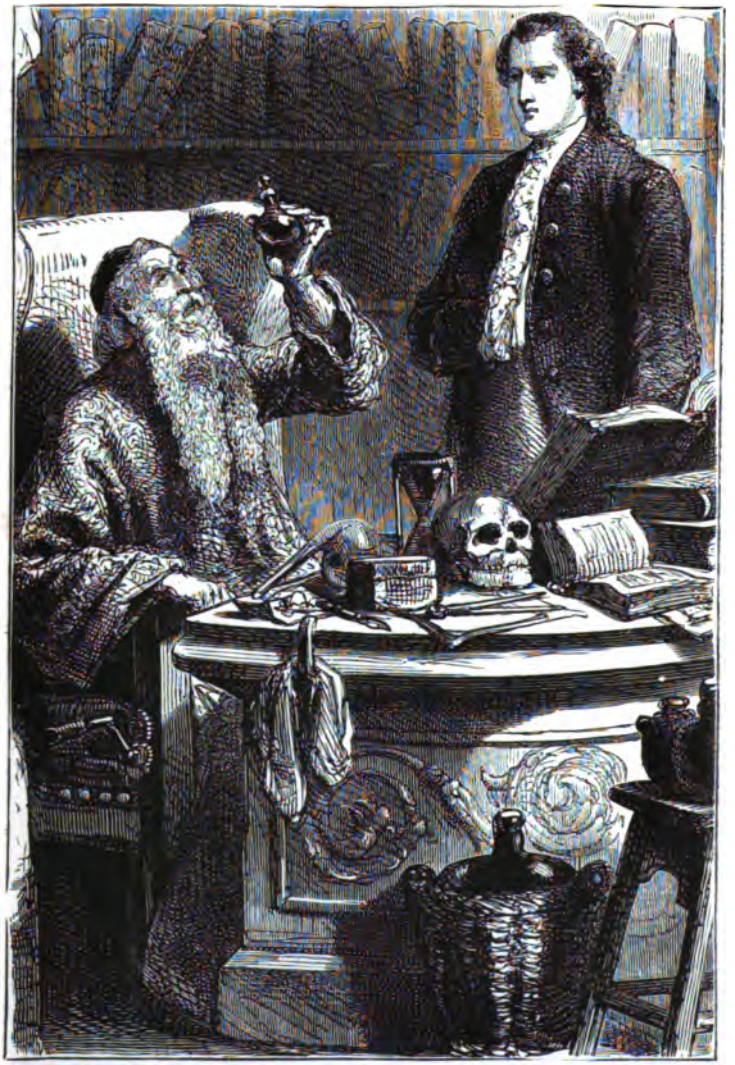
HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY

THE GIFT OF

KENNETH BALLARD MURDOCK
CLASS OF 1916

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

Nimrath.



THE ELIXIR OF LIFE.

Frontispiece.

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

AUTHOR OF

LONDON

[illegible] AND SONS

NEW YORK [illegible]

MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

AUTHOR OF

"THE THREE MUSKETEERS," "TWENTY YEARS AFTER," ETC

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS

BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL

NEW YORK: 416 BROOME STREET

1879

41529.107.2.3

HARVARD COLLEGE
MAY 15, 1924
LIBRARY

Thos. Kennard B. Murdock

Novels by Alexandre Dumas.

ILLUSTRATED EDITION.

MONTE CRISTO

THE THREE MUSKETEERS
TWENTY YEARS AFTER
THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS
CHICOT, THE JESTER
THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN

THE CONSPIRATORS
THE REGENT'S DAUGHTER

MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN
THE QUEEN'S NECKLACE
TAKING THE BASTILLE
THE COUNTESS DE CHARNY

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTORY	1
	i. HE WHO IS	4
	ii. L. P. D.	9
I.	THE STORM	16
II.	ALTHOTAS	20
III.	LORENZA FELICIANI	23
IV.	GILBERT	26
V.	THE BARON DE TAVERNEY	32
VI.	ANDRÉE DE TAVERNEY	37
VII.	EUREKA	43
VIII.	ATTRACTION	48
IX.	CLAIRVOYANCE	50
X.	NICOLE LEGAY	56
XI.	WAITING-MAID AND MISTRESS	62
XII.	THE MORNING	68
XIII.	PHILIP DE TAVERNEY	72
XIV.	MARIE ANTOINETTE JOSEPHE, ARCHDUCHESS OF AUSTRIA	76
XV.	MAGIC	81
XVI.	THE BARON DE TAVERNEY THINKS HE SEES AT LAST A SMALL OPENING INTO THE FUTURE	86
XVII.	NICOLE'S TWENTY-FIVE LOUIS-D'ORS	91
XVIII.	FAREWELL TO TAVERNEY	95
XIX.	GILBERT'S CROWN-PIECE	98
XX.	GILBERT RECOVERS THE LOSS OF HIS CROWN	101
XXI.	IN WHICH A NEW PERSONAGE MAKES HIS APPEARANCE	106
XXII.	VISCOUNT JEAN	111
XXIII.	THE COUNTESS DUBARRY'S MORNING LEVEE	116

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIV.	KING LOUIS THE FIFTEENTH	122
XXV.	THE SALOON OF TIME-PIECES	132
XXVI.	THE COURT OF KING PETAUD	136
XXVII.	MADAME LOUISE OF FRANCE	141
XXVIII.	LOQUE, CHIFFE, AND GRILLE	145
XXIX.	THE COUNTESS DE BEARN	150
XXX.	THE VICE	157
XXXI.	ZAMORE'S COMMISSION	166
XXXII.	THE KING GETS TIRED	174
XXXIII.	THE KING IS AMUSED	179
XXXIV.	VOLTAIRE AND ROUSSEAU	184
XXXV.	CHAPERON AND DEBUTANTE	190
XXXVI.	MARSHAL RICHELIEU'S FIFTH CONSPIRACY	198
XXXVII.	NO HAIRDRESSER, NO DRESS, NO CARRIAGE	203
XXXVIII.	THE PRESENTATION	212
XXXIX.	COMPIEGNE	220
XL.	THE PATRONESS AND THE PATRONISED	223
XLI.	THE PHYSICIAN AGAINST HIS WILL	228
XLII.	THE OLD MAN	234
XLIII.	THE BOTANIST	237
XLIV.	MONSIEUR JACQUES	246
XLV.	MONSIEUR JACQUES' GARRET	253
XLVI.	WHO MONSIEUR JACQUES WAS	258
XLVII.	THE SORCERER'S WIFE	264
XLVIII.	PARISIANS	267
XLIX.	THE KING'S CARRIAGES	272
L.	THE DEMONIAC	277
LI.	THE COUNT DE FENIX	283
LII.	THE CARDINAL DE ROHAN	294
LIII.	THE RETURN FROM SAINT DENIS	301
LIV.	THE GARDEN PAVILION	306
LV.	THE HOUSE IN THE RUE ST. CLAUDE	311
LVI.	THE DOUBLE EXISTENCE—SLEEP	315
LVII.	THE DOUBLE EXISTENCE—WAKING	317
LVIII.	THE VISIT	322
LIX.	GOLD	324
LX.	THE ELIXIR OF LIFE	331
LXI.	INQUIRIES	342
LXII.	THE APARTMENT IN THE RUE PLASTRIERE	348

CHAPTER		PAGE
LXIII.	PLAN OF CAMPAIGN	351
LXIV.	THE TWO FETES	356
LXV.	THE FIREWORKS	362
LXVI.	THE FIELD OF THE DEAD	366
LXVII.	THE RETURN	372
LXVIII.	M. DE JUSSIEU	376
LXIX.	LIFE RETURNS	380
LXX.	THE AERIAL TRIP	382
LXXI.	THE BROTHER AND SISTER	386
LXXII.	WHAT GILBERT HAD FORESEEN	393
LXXIII.	THE BOTANISTS	397
LXXIV.	THE PHILOSOPHERS IN THE TRAP	400
LXXV.	THE APOLOGUE	404
LXXVI.	THE MAKE-SHIFT OF HIS MAJESTY LOUIS XV.	411
LXXVII.	HOW KING LOUIS XV. TRANSACTED BUSINESS	416
LXXVIII.	THE LITTLE TRIANON	420
LXXIX.	THE CONSPIRACY IS RENEWED	424
LXXX.	THE SORCERER CHASE	429
LXXXI.	THE COURIER	436
LXXXII.	THE EVOCATION	440
LXXXIII.	THE VOICE	447
LXXXIV.	DISGRACE	450
LXXXV.	THE DUKE D'AIGUILLON	455
LXXXVI.	THE KING DIVIDES THE SPOILS	461
LXXXVII.	THE ANTECHAMBER OF THE DUKE DE RICHELIEU	466
LXXXVIII.	RICHELIEU IS DISABUSED	472
LXXXIX.	THE DAUPHIN'S FAMILY REPAST	475
XC.	THE QUEEN'S HAIR	481
XCI.	M. DE RICHELIEU APPRECIATES NICOLE	486
XCII.	THE TRANSFORMATION	491
XCIII.	HOW PLEASURE TO SOME IS DESPAIR TO OTHERS	494
XCIV.	THE PARLIAMENTS	499
XCV.	IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THE PATH OF A MINISTER IS NOT ALWAYS STREWN WITH ROSES	504
XCVI.	M. D'AIGUILLON TAKES HIS REVENGE	507
XCVII.	IN WHICH THE READER WILL ONCE MORE MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE WHOM HE THOUGHT LOST, AND WHOM, PERHAPS, HE DID NOT REGRET	511
XCVIII.	THE CONFUSION INCREASES	517

CHAPTER		PAGE
XCIX.	THE BED OF JUSTICE	521
C.	THE INFLUENCE OF THE WORDS OF THE UNKNOWN UPON J. J. ROUSSEAU	525
CI.	THE HOUSE IN THE RUE PLASTRIERE	529
CII.	THE REPORT	534
CIII.	THE BODY AND THE SOUL	541
CIV.	BODY AND SOUL	549
CV.	MARAT'S PORTRESS	555
CVI.	THE MAN AND HIS WORKS	562
CVII.	ROUSSEAU'S TOILET	567
CVIII.	THE SIDE SCENES OF TRIANON	570
CIX.	THE REHEARSAL	577
CX.	THE CASKET	580
CXI.	KING LOUIS XV.'S PETIT SOUPER	584
CXII.	PRESENTIMENTS	591
CXIII.	GILBERT'S ROMANCE	595
CXIV.	FATHER AND DAUGHTER	599
CXV.	WHAT ALTHOTAS WANTED TO COMPLETE HIS ELIXIR	603
CXVI.	M. DE RICHELIEU'S TWO DROPS OF WATER	611
CXVII.	THE FLIGHT	618
CXVIII.	DOUBLE SIGHT	623
CXIX.	THE WILL	629
CXX.	THE HOTEL OF M. DE SARTINES	633
CXXI.	THE COFFER	637
CXXII.	CONVERSATION	642
CXXIII.	SARTINES BEGINS TO THINK BALSAMO A SORCERER	647
CXXIV.	THE ELIXIR OF LIFE	651
CXXV.	THE STRUGGLE	655
CXXVI.	LOVE	657
CXXVII.	THE PHILTRE	663
CXXVIII.	BLOOD	668
CXXIX.	DESPAIR	673
CXXX.	THE JUDGMENT	677
CXXXI.	DOOM	681
	EPILOGUE: THE NINTH OF MAY	685

MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN.

INTRODUCTORY.

NEAR the source of the Seltz, on the left bank of the Rhine, some leagues from the imperial city of Worms, there begins a range of mountains, the scattered and rugged summits of which disappear northward like a herd of wild buffaloes vanishing in a mist.

These mountains, which from their lofty summits overlook an almost desert region, and seem but to form an attendant train to one which is their chief, have each a peculiar figure, and each bears a name indicating some tradition connected with it. One is the King's Chair—another the Wild-rose Stone; this the Falcon's Rock—that the Serpent's Crest.

The highest of all, which raises to the clouds its granite top, girt with a crown of ruins, is Mont Tonnerre.

When evening deepens the shadows of the lofty oaks—when the last rays of the sun die away on the peaks of this family of giants, we might imagine that silence descended from these sublime heights to the plain—that an invisible hand unfolded from their declivities the dark blue veil through which we see the stars, to wrap it over the world, wearied with the toil and the noise of day. Waking gives place to sleep, and all the tenants of earth and air repose.

Even then is not heard the stream of the Seltz, pursuing its mysterious course by the fir-trees on its banks, stopping not by day or night, for it must hurry on to the Rhine, which to it is eternity. The sands of its current are so smooth, its reeds so flexible, its rocks so richly clothed with moss, that not one of its waves murmurs, from Morsheim, where it rises, to Freewenheim, where it finishes its course.

A little above its source, between Albisheim and Kircheim-Poland, a road, winding deep between two rugged walls of rock, leads to Danenfels. Beyond Danenfels the road becomes a path; it narrows, is lost, and the eye seeks in vain anything on which to rest, except the slopes of Mont Tonnerre, whose lightning-blasted summit is hidden by a belt of trees impenetrable to the eye.

In fact, once under those trees, leafy as the oaks of Dodona of old, the traveller may in open day continue his way unseen by any one on the plain below. Were his horse hung with more bells than any mule in Spain, not a sound would be heard; were his trappings of gold and jewels like those of an emperor, not a ray from them would pierce through the foliage, so powerful is the density of the forest in extinguishing sound, and its darkness in dimming the brightest colours.

Even at the present day, when our highest mountains have become mere observatories for every-day tourists, on whose lips the most fearful of the legends of poetry call up a smile of doubt, even now this solitude

has its terrors. A few miserable looking houses, outposts of neighbouring villages, appear here and there, but at a distance from the magic belt, to show that man is to be found in that region. Their inhabitants are millers, who carry their flour to Rockenhausen or Alzey, or shepherds who herd their flocks around the mountain, they and their dogs trembling often to hear some enormous fir-tree fall with age, crashing in the unknown depths of the forest.

All the fire-side tales of the country are gloomy, and that path which is lost beyond Danenfels, among the heath and furze of the mountains, has not always, they say, led good Christians to a safe shelter. Perhaps there yet may live one of those country people who has heard his father or his grandfather tell what we are now about to relate.

On the 6th of May, 1770, at that hour when the waters of the great river are tinged with a pale rose colour, that is to say, when the inhabitants of the Rhingau see the setting sun sink behind the spire of Strasburg Cathedral, which divides it into two hemispheres of fire—a man who came from Mayence, having passed through Alzey and Kircheim-Poland, appeared beyond the village of Danenfels. He followed the path so long as the path was visible, then, when all trace of it vanished, dismounting from his horse, he fastened its bridle to the first fir-tree of the pathless forest.

The animal neighed uneasily, and the woods seemed to start at a sound so unusual.

"Gently, gently, Djerid!—twelve leagues are enough for you—here you must wait my return."

The traveller tried to peer into the recesses of the forest, but in vain—he could only see masses of dark shadows relieved upon shadows yet darker. Turning then to his horse, whose Arab name declared his race and swiftness, he took his head between his hands, approached his lips to the smoking nostrils of the animal and said, "Farewell, my good horse!—farewell, if it be fated that we meet not again."

As he said these words he looked quickly around, as if he feared they might have been overheard, or as if he desired it. The horse shook his silky mane, pawed and neighed, as he would in the desert on the approach of the lion. The traveller stroked down his head with a smile which seemed to say, "Thou art not wrong, Djerid, there is danger here."

Then, having decided beforehand, no doubt, not to oppose force against this danger, the unknown adventurer drew from his saddlebow two richly mounted pistols, took out their balls, and sprinkled the powder on the ground. This done, he put them back in their place. Then he unbuckled a sword with a steel handle, wrapped the belt of it round it, and put all together under the saddle, so that the pommel of the sword was towards the horse's shoulder. After these formalities, the traveller shook off the dust from his boots, took off his gloves, felt in his pockets, and having found a pair of small scissors and a penknife with a tortoise-shell handle, he threw first the one and then the other over his shoulder, without looking where they fell. That done, he again stroked Djerid. breathed deeply, as if to expand his chest, feeling that his strength was about to be taxed, and sought a pathway among the trees. He found none, and at last entered the forest at a venture.

It is time that we should give our readers some idea of the traveller's appearance, as he is destined to play an important part in our history.

He was a man apparently of thirty or two-and-thirty years of age, of middle height, but admirably made, and his every movement exhibited a

fine combination of strength and flexibility of limb. He was dressed in a travelling coat of black velvet, with gold buttons, under which appeared an embroidered waistcoat: tight-fitting breeches of leather, and polished boots, on limbs which might have served as a model for a sculptor, completed his costume. As to his face, whose rapid changes of expression bespoke him of a southern race, there were in it both tact and power of character. His eye, which could express every feeling, seemed to read the soul of any one on whom it rested. His complexion, naturally dark, had been rendered darker by exposure to a warmer sun than ours. His mouth large, but well formed, showed a fine set of teeth, the whiteness of which was heightened by contrast with the darkness of his skin. His foot was long, but finely formed, and his hand small, but sinewy.

Scarcely had he advanced two steps among the dark fir trees, when he heard the quick tramp of hoofs in the direction where he had left his horse. His first movement was to turn back, but he stopped himself; however, he could not resist the wish to know the fate of Djerid—he raised himself on tiptoe and glanced through an opening. Djerid had disappeared, guided by an invisible hand which had untied his bridle. A slight frown contracted the brow of the unknown, yet something like a smile curled his chiselled lips.

Then he went on his way towards the centre of the forest.

For a few steps further the twilight aided him, then it left him, and in darkness so thick, that seeing no longer where to place his foot, he stopped.

"I got on very well to Danenfels, for from Mayence to Danenfels there is a road," said he aloud, "and from Danenfels to the Dark Heath, because there is a path, and from the Dark Heath hither, though there is neither road nor path, because I could see where I was going—but now I must stop—I see nothing."

Scarcely had he pronounced these words, in a dialect half French, half Sicilian, when a light appeared about fifty paces from the traveller.

"Thanks," said he, "now as the light moves I shall follow."

The light moved steadily on, with a gliding motion, as we sometimes see a light move over the stage of a theatre.

The traveller might have gone about a hundred steps farther when he thought he felt a breathing at his ear. He started.

"Turn not," said a voice on the right, "or thou art dead!"

"Good!" replied the immovable traveller.

"Speak not," said a voice on the left, "or thou art dead!"

The traveller bowed without speaking.

"But if thou art afraid," said a third voice, which, like that of Hamlet's father, seemed to come from the bowels of the earth, "turn back; that will declare that thou abandonest thy scheme, and thou shalt be permitted to go."

The traveller made a gesture of dissent with his hand, and went on.

The night was so dark and the forest so thick that he could not advance without occasionally stumbling, and his progress was slow. For nearly an hour the flame moved on, and he followed without hearing a murmur, and without showing a symptom of fear.

All at once it disappeared.

The traveller was out of the forest. He raised his eyes, and in the dark blue sky saw some twinkling stars.

He continued to advance in the direction of the place where the light had disappeared, and soon saw arise before him a ruin, the spectre, as it were, of some ancient castle.

Next, his foot struck against some of its fragments. Then something cold passed his temples and sealed up his eyes, and he saw not even the shadows of outward objects.

A bandage of wet linen bound his head. This was only what he expected, no doubt, as he made no effort to remove it. He only silently stretched out his hand, like a blind man imploring a guide. His gesture was understood. A cold, dry, bony hand grasped the fingers of the traveller.

He knew that it was the hand of a skeleton, but if that hand had been endowed with sensation, it would have felt that his did not tremble.

Then the traveller felt himself rapidly drawn on for about a hundred paces. Suddenly the hand released its grasp, the bandage fell from his eyes, he stopped—he was on the summit of Mont Tonnerre.

II.—HE WHO IS.

In the midst of a glade formed by larches, bare with age, rose one of those feudal castles which the crusaders, on their return from the Holy Land, scattered over Europe. The gateways and arches had been finely sculptured, and in their niches were statues; but these lay broken at the foot of the walls, and creeping plants and wild flowers now filled their places.

The traveller on opening his eyes found himself before the damp and mossy steps of the principal entrance; on the first of these steps stood the phantom by whose bony hand he had been led thither. A long shroud wrapped it from head to foot, and the eyeless sockets darted flames. Its fleshless hand pointed to the interior of the ruins as the termination of the traveller's journey. This interior was a hall, the lower part of which was but half seen, but from its vaults, heaped with ruins, flickered a dim and mysterious light.

The traveller bowed in assent. The phantom mounted slowly step by step to the hall and plunged into the ruins. The unknown followed calmly and slowly up the eleven steps which this spectre had trodden, and entered also. With the noise of a clashing wall of brass the great gate of the portal closed behind him.

At the entrance of a circular hall, lighted by three lamps, which cast a greenish light, the phantom stopped. The traveller, ten steps farther back, stopped in his turn.

"Open thine eyes!" said the phantom.

"I see!" replied the unknown.

The phantom then drew, with a proud gesture, a two-edged sword from beneath his shroud, and struck it against a column of bronze. A hollow metallic groan responded to its blow.

Then all around the hall arose stone seats, and numerous phantoms, like the first, appeared. Each was armed with a two-edged sword, and each took his place on a seat, and seen by the pale green light of the three lamps, they might have been taken, so cold and motionless were they, for statues on their pedestals. And these human statues came out in strange relief on the black tapestry of the walls.

Some seats were placed in advance of the others, on which sat six spectres who seemed like chiefs—one seat was vacant.

He who sat on the middle seat arose.

"Brethren, how many are present?" he asked, turning to the assembly.

"Three hundred," replied the phantoms with one voice. It thundered through the hall, and died away among the funeral hangings on the walls.

"Three hundred," replied the president, "and each speaks for ten thousand companions! Three hundred swords which are equal to three millions of poniards!"

Then he turned to the traveller. "What dost thou wish?" he asked.

"To see the light," replied the other.

"The paths which lead to the mountain of fire are rugged and difficult. Fearest thou not?"

"I fear nothing."

"One step forward and you cannot return. Reflect!"

"I stop not till I reach the goal."

"Wilt thou swear?"

"Dictate the oath!"

The president raised his hand, and with a slow and solemn voice, pronounced these words: "In the name of the crucified Son, swear to break all bonds of nature which unite thee to father, mother, brother, sister, wife, relation, friend, mistress, king, benefactor, and to any being whatever to whom thou hast promised faith, obedience, gratitude, or service!"

The traveller, with a firm voice, repeated these words, and then the president dictated the second part of the oath.

"From this moment thou art free from the pretended oath thou hast taken to thy country and its laws; swear thou to reveal to the new head whom thou acknowledgest all that thou hast seen or done, read or guessed, and henceforward to search out and penetrate into that which may not openly present itself to thine eyes."

The president stopped; the unknown repeated the words.

"Honour and respect the *aqua tofana*, as a prompt, sure, and necessary means of ridding the world by the death or idiocy of those who would degrade truth or tear it from us."

An echo could not have been more exact than the unknown in repeating the words of the president.

"Flee from Spain, flee from Naples, flee from every accursed land; flee from the temptation of revealing aught that thou shalt now see and hear! Lightning is not more quick to strike than will be the invisible and inevitable knife, wherever thou mayest be, shouldst thou fail in thy secrecy."

Spite of the threat conveyed in these last words, no trace of emotion was seen on the face of the unknown; he pronounced the end of the oath with a voice as calm as at the beginning.

"And now," continued the president, "put on his forehead the sacred band!"

Two phantoms approached the unknown—he bowed his head—one of them bound round it a crimson ribbon covered with silver characters, placed alternately with the figure of our Lady of Loretto; the other tied it behind, just at the nape of the neck. Then they left his side.

"What wouldst thou ask?" inquired the president.

"Three things."

"Name them!"

"The hand of iron, the sword of fire, the scales of adamant."

"Why the hand of iron?"

"To stifle tyranny."

"Why the sword of fire?"

"To banish the impure from the earth."

"And why the scales of adamant?"

"To weigh the destinies of humanity."

"Canst thou withstand the necessary trials?"

"Courage is prepared for all trials."

"The proofs! the proofs!" cried many voices.

"Turn!" said the president.

The unknown obeyed, and found himself face to face with a man pale as death, bound and gagged.

"What seest thou?" asked the president.

"A malefactor or a victim."

"A traitor! One who took the oath as thou hast done, and then revealed the secrets of our order."

"A criminal, then."

"Yes."

"What penalty has he incurred?"

"Death."

The three hundred phantoms repeated "Death!" and, in spite of all his efforts, the condemned was dragged into a darker part of the hall. The traveller saw him struggle with his executioners—he heard his choking voice—a dagger glimmered for an instant—a blow was struck—and a dead and heavy sound announced a body falling on the earthy floor.

"Justice is done!" said the unknown, turning to the ghastly assembly who, from beneath their shrouds, had devoured the sight with greedy looks.

"Then," said the president, "thou dost approve what has been done?"

"Yes, if he who has fallen was really guilty."

"Thou wilt drink to the death of every man who, like him, would betray our secrets?"

"I will!"

"Whatever be the draught?"

"Whatever be the draught."

"Bring the cup," said the president.

One of the two executioners brought the unknown a red tepid liquor in a human skull. He took this frightful cup, raised it above his head saying, "I drink to the death of every man who shall betray the secrets of this holy society."

Then, bringing it to his lips, he drained it to the last drop, and returned it calmly to him who had presented it.

A murmur of surprise ran through the assembly, and the phantoms seemed to look at each other through their half-opened shrouds.

"Good!" said the president. "The pistol!"

A phantom drew near the president, holding in one hand a pistol and in the other a ball and a charge of powder.

"Thou promisest passive obedience to our behests?"

"Yes."

"Even if this obedience be put to the proof against thyself?"

"He who enters here is no longer his own: he belongs to all."

"Then thou obeyest whatever order be given thee?"

"I obey."

"This instant?"

"This instant?"

"No pause?"

"No pause!"

"Take this pistol—load it!"

The unknown took the pistol and loaded it, all the dread assembly looking on the operation in a silence only broken by the sighs of the wind among the arches of the ruin.

"The pistol is loaded," said the unknown.

"Art thou sure?" asked the president.

A smile passed over the lips of the traveller as he tried the pistol, showing that it was loaded. The president bowed in token of being satisfied.

"Yes," said he, "it is loaded."

"What am I to do with it?"

"Cock it."

The unknown cocked the pistol, and its click was distinctly heard in the intervals of silence in the dialogue.

"Now put it to thy forehead," said the president.

He obeyed unhesitatingly. The silence seemed to deepen over the assembly, and the lamps to turn pale. These were real phantoms, for not a breath was then heard.

"Fire!" said the president.

The cock was heard to snap, the flint flashed, but the powder in the pan alone took fire, and no report accompanied its quick flame.

A shout of admiration burst from every breast, and the president involuntarily extended his hand to the unknown.

But two proofs were not sufficient to satisfy all and some voices shouted, "The dagger! the dagger!"

"You demand that, also?" said the president.

"Yes—the dagger! the dagger!" replied the voices.

"Bring the dagger," said the president.

"It is useless," said the unknown, making a disdainful movement with his head.

"Useless!" cried the assembly.

"Yes, useless!" he replied, with a voice which drowned every other; "useless! You lose time, and it is precious."

"What mean you?" asked the president.

"I tell you I know your secrets—that these proofs of yours are but child's play, unworthy of men. I tell you that I know the body which lies there is not dead; that I have not drunk blood; that, by a spring, the charge fell into the butt at the moment I cocked the pistol. Such things may frighten cowards. Rise, pretended corpse, thou hast no terrors for the brave."

Another shout made the vaults ring.

"Thou knowest our mysteries, then?" said the president. "Thou art one of the illuminated or a traitor!"

"Who art thou?" demanded the three hundred voices; and on the instant twenty swords, in the hands of the nearest phantoms, were pointed, with a motion as precise as if directed by a military signal, at the bosom of the unknown.

He smiled, shook the thick curls of his hair, which, unpowdered, were only retained by the ribbon which had been bound round his head, and said calmly, "*I am he who is.*"

Then he turned his eyes slowly around the living wall which hemmed him in, and gradually sword after sword sank before him.

"Thou hast spoken rashly," said the president. "Doubtless thou knowest not the import of thy words."

The stranger shook his head and smiled.

"I have spoken the truth."

"Whence comest thou?"

"I come whence comes the light."

"But we have learned that thou comest from Sweden."

"I might come from Sweden, and yet from the East."

"Then we know thee not. Who art thou?"

"Who am I? Ay, ye shall know more. Ye pretend not to understand me; but first I will tell you who you are!"

The phantoms started, and the clang of their swords was heard as they grasped them in their right hands and raised them to the level of the stranger's breast.

"First," said he, "thou who questionest me, who believest thyself a god, and who art but the forerunner of one, thou who representest Sweden, I shall name thee, that the rest may know I can also name them. Swedenborg, how comes it thy familiars told thee not that he whom thou waitedst for was on the road?"

"They did declare it to me," replied the president, putting aside a fold of his shroud in order to see him better who spoke, and in doing so, contrary to all the habits of the association, he showed a white beard and the venerable face of a man of eighty.

"Good!" replied the stranger. "On thy left is the representative of England or of Old Caledonia. I grant you, my lord, if the blood of your grandfather flows in your veins, England's extinguished light may be rekindled."

The swords sank—anger gave place to astonishment.

"Ah, captain," said the unknown, addressing one on the left of the president, "in what port waits thy good ship? A noble frigate the *Providence*. Its name augurs well for America."

Then, turning towards him on the right—

"Look, Prophet of Zurich, thou hast carried physiognomy almost to divination—read the lines on my face, and acknowledge my mission."

He to whom he spoke recoiled.

"Come," said he, turning to another, "descendant of Pelago, we must drive the Moors a second time from Spain—an easy task if the Castilians yet retain the sword of the Cid!"

The fifth chief remained so still, so motionless, that the voice of the unknown seemed to have turned him to stone.

"And to me," said the sixth; "hast thou nought to say to me?"

"Ay," replied the traveller, turning on him a look which read his heart, "ay, what Jesus said to Judas; but not yet."

The chief turned paler than his shroud, and a murmur running through the assembly seemed to demand the cause of this singular accusation.

"Thou forgettest the representative of France," said the president.

"He is not here," replied the stranger haughtily; "and that thou knowest well, since his seat is vacant. Learn, then, that snares make him smile who sees in darkness, who acts in spite of the elements, and who lives in spite of death."

"Thou art young," replied the president, "and thou speakest as if from divine authority. Reflect! boldness overcomes only the weak or the ignorant."

A disdainful smile played over the lips of the stranger.

"You are all weak, since you have no power over me! you are all ignorant, since ye know not who I am! Boldness, then, alone might overcome you; but why should one all-powerful so overcome?"

"Give us the proof of your boasted power?" said the president.

"Who convoked you?" asked the unknown, becoming the interrogator instead of the interrogated.

"The grand assembly."

"And not without a cause hast thou," pointing to the president, "come from Sweden; thou," and he turned from one to another of the five chiefs as he spoke, "thou from London, thou from New York, thou from Zurich, thou from Madrid, thou from Warsaw, and you all," looking round the assembly, "from the four winds of heaven, to meet in the sanctuary of the dreaded faith."

"No," replied the president, "not without cause, for we came to meet him who has founded in the East a mysterious faith, joining two worlds in one belief, entwining mankind with the bonds of brotherhood."

"Is there any sign by which you shall know him?"

"Yes," said the president; "and an angel has revealed it to me."

"You alone know it?"

"I alone."

"You have revealed it to none?"

"To none."

"Name it."

The president hesitated.

"Name it! the hour is come."

"He will bear on his breast a diamond star, and on it three letters, the signification of which is only known to himself."

"Declare the letters."

"L. P. D."

The stranger rapidly threw open his coat and vest, and on his fine Holland shirt shone like a flaming star the diamond, and the three letters formed of rubies.

"It is HE!" cried the president.

"He whom we await?" asked the chiefs.

"The Great Copt?" murmured the three hundred voices.

"Now," cried the stranger triumphantly, "do you believe me when I say, 'I am he that is?"

"Yes," said the phantoms, prostrating themselves before him.

"Speak, master," said the president, "speak; we shall obey!"

III.—L. P. D.

There was silence for some moments, during which the unknown seemed to collect his thoughts. Then he began:

"Sirs, ye but weary your arms with your swords; lay them aside, and lend an attentive ear, for you shall learn much from the few words which I am about to utter."

All were profoundly attentive.

"The sources of great rivers are sacred, therefore unknown. Like the Nile, the Ganges, the Amazon, I know to what I tend, not whence I come. All that I can reveal is that, when the eyes of my spirit first opened to comprehend external things, I was in Medina, the holy city, playing in the gardens of the Mufti Salaaym. He was a venerable man, kind as a father to me, yet not my father; for though he looked on me with love, he

spoke to me with respect. Thrice a day he left me, and then came another old man, whose name I may pronounce with gratitude, yet with fear. He was called Althotas, and him the seven great spirits had taught all that the angels know, in order to comprehend God. He was my tutor, my master, my friend—a friend to be venerated indeed, for his age was double that of most among you."

His solemn tone, his majestic deportment, deeply impressed the assembly; they seemed trembling with anxiety to hear more.

He continued:

"When I reached my fifteenth year I was initiated into the mysteries of nature. I knew botany, not as one of your learned men, who has acquired only the knowledge of the plants of his own corner of the world—to me were known the sixty thousand families of plants of the whole earth. My master, pressing his hands on my forehead, made a ray of celestial light descend on my soul; then could I perceive beneath the seas the wondrous vegetations which are tossed by the waves, in the giant branches of which are cradled monsters unknown to the eye of man.

"All tongues, living and dead, I knew. I could speak every language spoken from the Dardanelles to the Straits of Magellan. I could read the dark hieroglyphics on those granite books, the pyramids. From Sanchoniathon to Socrates, from Moses to Jerome, from Zoroaster to Agrippa, all human knowledge was mine.

"Medicine I studied, not only in Hippocrates, in Galen, and in Averrhoes, but in that great teacher, Nature. I penetrated the secrets of the Copts and the Druses. I gathered up the seeds of destruction and of scarcity. When the simoom or the hurricane swept over my head, I threw to it one of those seeds, which its breath bore on, carrying death or life to whomsoever I had condemned or blessed.

"In the midst of these studies I reached my twentieth year. Then my master sought me one day in a grove, to which I had retired from the heat of the day. His face was at the same moment grave and smiling. He held a little vial in his hand. 'Acharat,' said he, 'I have told thee that nothing is born, nothing dies in the world—that the cradle and the coffin are twins; that man wants only to see into past existences to be equal to the gods, and that when that power shall be acquired by him, he will be as immortal as they. Behold! I have found the beverage which will dispel his darkness, thinking that I had found that which destroys death. Acharat, I drank of it yesterday—see, the vial is not full; drink thou the rest to-day.'

"I had entire confidence in my venerable master, yet my hand trembled as it touched the vial which he offered me, as Adam's might have done when Eve presented him with the apple.

"'Drink!' said he, smiling.

"I drank.

"Then he placed his hands on my head, as he always did when he would make light penetrate to my soul.

"'Sleep!' said he.

"Immediately I slept, and I dreamed that I was lying on a pile of sandal-wood and aloes. An angel, passing by on the behests of the Highest from the east to the west, touched the pile with the tip of his wing, and it kindled into flame. Yet I, far from being afraid—far from dreading the fire—lay voluptuously in the midst of it, like the phœnix, drawing in new life from the source of all life.

"Then my material frame vanished away; my soul only remained. It

preserved the form of my body, but transparent, impalpable ; it was lighter than the atmosphere in which we live, and it rose above it. Then, like Pythagoras, who remembered that in a former state he had been at the siege of Troy, I remembered the past. I had experienced thirty-two existences, and I recalled them all. I saw ages pass before me like a train of aged men in procession. I beheld myself under the different names which I had borne from the day of my first birth to that of my last death. You know, brethren—and it is an essential article of our faith—that souls, those countless emanations of the Deity, fill the air, and are formed into numerous hierarchies, descending from the sublime to the base ; and the man who, at the moment of his birth, inhales one of those pre-existing souls, gives it up at his death, that it may enter on a new course of transformations."

He said this in a tone so expressive of conviction, and his look had something so sublime, that the assembly interrupted him by a murmur of admiration.

"When I awoke," continued the illuminated, "I felt that I was more than man—that I was almost divine. Then I resolved to dedicate not only my present existence, but all my future ones, to the happiness of man.

"The next day, as if he had guessed my thoughts, Althotas said to me, 'My son, twenty years ago thy mother expired in giving birth to thee. Since that time, invincible obstacles have prevented thy illustrious father revealing himself to thee. We shall travel, we shall meet thy father ; he will embrace thee, but thou wilt not know him.'

"Thus, in me, as in one of the elect, all was mysterious—past, present, future.

"I bade adieu to the Mufti Salaaym, who blessed me and loaded me with presents, and we joined a caravan going to Suez.

"Pardon me, sirs, if I give way for a moment to emotion, as I recall that one day a venerable man embraced me ; a strange thrill ran through me as I felt his heart beat against mine.

"He was the Cheriffe of Mecca, a great and illustrious prince, who had seen a hundred battles, and at the raising of his hand three millions of men bent their heads before him. Althotas turned away to hide his feelings, perhaps not to betray a secret, and we continued our road.

"We went into the heart of Asia ; we ascended the Tigris ; we visited Palmyra, Damascus, Smyrna, Constantinople, Vienna, Berlin, Dresden, Moscow, Stockholm, Petersburg, New York, Buenos Ayres, the Cape of Good Hope, and Aden ; then, being near the point at which we had set out, we proceeded into Abyssinia, descended the Nile, sailed to Rhodes, and, lastly, to Malta. Before landing, a vessel came out to meet us, bringing two knights of the order ; they saluted me and embraced Althotas, and conducted us in a sort of triumph to the palace of the Grand Master, Pinto.

"Now, you will ask me, sirs, how it came that the Mussulman Acharat was received with honour by those who have vowed the extermination of the infidels. Althotas, a Catholic, and himself a knight of Malta, had always spoken to me of one only God, omnipotent, universal, who, by the aid of angels, his ministers, made the world a harmonious whole, and to this whole he gave the great name of Cosmos. I was, then, not a Mussulman but a theosophist.

"My journeyings ended ; but in truth, all that I had seen had awakened in me no astonishment, because for me there was nothing new under the sun, and in my preceding thirty-two existences I had visited the cities before through which I had lately passed. All that struck me was some

change in their inhabitants. Now I would hover over events and watch the progress of man. I saw that all minds tend onward, and that this tendency leads to liberty. I saw that prophets had been raised up from time to time to aid the wavering advances of the human race; and that men, half blind from their cradle, make but one step towards the light in a century. Centuries are the days of nations.

"'Then,' said I to myself, 'so much has not been revealed to me that it should remain buried in my soul; in vain does the mountain contain veins of gold, in vain does the ocean hide its pearls, for the persevering miner penetrates to the bowels of the mountain, the diver descends to the depths of the ocean, but better than the mountain or the ocean, let me be like the sun, shedding blessings on the whole earth.'

"You understand, then, that it is not to go through some masonic ceremonies I have come from the East. I have come to say to you, brethren, take the wings and the eyes of the eagle! rise above the world, and cast your eyes over its kingdoms!

"Nations form but one vast body. Men, though born at different periods, in different ranks, arrive all in turn at that goal to reach which they were created. They are continually advancing, though seemingly stationary, and if they appear to retreat a step from time to time, it is but to collect strength for a bound which shall carry them over some obstacle in their way.

"France is the advance-guard of nations. Put a torch in her hand, and though it kindle a wide-spreading flame, it will be salutary, for it will enlighten the world.

"The representative of France is not here—it may be that he has recoiled at the task imposed on him. Well, then! we must have a man who will not shrink from it—I will go to France."

"You are in France," said the president.

"Yes; the most important post I take myself—the most perilous work shall be mine."

"You know what passes in France, then?" inquired the president.

The stranger smiled.

"I know, for I myself have prepared all. An old king, weak, vicious, yet not so old, not so weak, not so vicious as the monarchy which he represents, sits on the throne of France. He has but few years to live. Events must be prepared to succeed his death. France is the keystone of the arch; let but this stone be unfixed, and the monarchial edifice will fall! Ay, the day that Europe's most arrogant sovereigns shall hear that there is no longer a king in France, bewildered, they will of themselves rush into the abyss left by the destruction of the throne of Saint Louis!"

Here, he on the right of the president spoke, and his German accent announced that he was a Swiss. "Most venerated master, hast thou then calculated all?" he asked.

"All!" replied the Great Copt.

"Your pardon if I say more—but on our mountains, in our valleys, by our lakes, our words are free as the winds and the waters—let me say, then, that a great event is on the eve of arriving, and that to it the French monarchy may owe its regeneration. I have seen, great master, a daughter of Maria Theresa travelling in state towards France to unite the blood of seventeen emperors with that of the successor of the sixty-one kings of France, and the people rejoiced blindly, as they do when their chains are slackened, or when they bow beneath a gilded yoke. I would infer, then, that the crisis is not yet come!"

All turned to him who so calmly and boldly had spoken to their master.

"Speak on, brother," said the Great Copt; "if thy advice be good, it shall be followed. We are chosen of heaven, and we may not sacrifice the interests of a world to wounded pride."

The deputy from Switzerland continued, amidst deep silence: "My studies have convinced me of one truth, that the physiognomy of men reveals, to the eye which knows how to read it, their virtues and their vices. We may see a composed look or a smile, for these, caused by muscular movements, are in their power, but the great type of character is still imprinted legibly on the countenance, declaring what passes in the heart. The tiger can caress, can give a kindly look, but his low forehead, his projecting face, his great occiput, declare him tiger still. The dog growls, shows his teeth, but his honest eye, his intelligent face, declare him still the friend of man. God has imprinted on each creature's face its name and nature. I have seen the young girl who is to reign in France; on her forehead I read the pride, the courage, the tenderness, of the German maiden. I have seen the young man who is to be her husband; calmness, Christian meekness, and a high regard for the rights of others, characterise him. Now France, remembering no wrongs, and forgetting no benefits, since a Charlemagne, a Louis, and a Henry have been sufficient to preserve on the throne twenty base and cruel kings; France, who hopes on, despairs never, will she not adore a young lovely kindly queen, a patient, gentle, economical king? and this, too, after the disastrous reign of Louis XV.—after his hateful orgies, his mean revenges, his Pompadours and Dubarries? Will not France bless her youthful sovereigns, who will bring to her as their dowry peace with Europe? Marie Antoinette now crosses the frontier; the altar and the nuptial bed are prepared at Versailles. Is this the time to begin in France your work of regeneration? Pardon if I have dared to submit these thoughts to you, whose wisdom is infallible!"

At these words, he whom the Great Copt had addressed as the apostle of Zurich bowed as he received the applause of the assembly and awaited a reply.

He did not wait long.

"If you read physiognomy, illustrious brethren, I read the future. Marie Antoinette is proud; she will interfere in the coming struggle, and will perish in it. Louis Augustus is mild; he will yield to it, and will perish with her, but each will fall through opposite defects of character. Now they esteem each other, but short will be their love; in a year they will feel mutual contempt. Why, then, deliberate, brethren, to discover whence comes the light? It is revealed to me. I come from the east, led, like the shepherds, by a star, which foretells a second regeneration of mankind. To-morrow I begin my work. Give me twenty years for it—that will be enough, if we are united and firm."

"Twenty years?" murmured several voices—"the time is long."

The Great Copt turned to those who thus betrayed impatience.

"Yes," said he, "it is long to those who think that a principle is destroyed, as a man is killed, with the dagger of Jacques Clement or the knife of Damiens. Fools!—the knife kills the man, but, like the pruning-hook, it lops a branch that the other branches may take its place. In the stead of the murdered king rises up a Louis XIII., a stupid tyrant—a Louis XIV., a cunning despot—a Louis XV., an idol whose path is wet with tears of blood, like the monstrous deities of India, crushing with changeless smile women and children, who cast garlands before their chariot wheels. And

to thy countrymen if they rise against us ; for our people will devour in its wrath, as the wrath of God devours."

The trembling Swiss bowed and departed.

"Hear, Ximenes," he went on, addressing the Spaniard, "thou art zealous, but distrustful. Thy country sleeps, but it is because none awakes her. Go ! Castile is still the country of the Cid !"

The last of the six was advancing, but by a gesture the Copt forbade him.

"Scieffort of Russia, before a month thou wilt betray our cause, but in a month thou shalt be no more."

The Russian envoy fell on his knees, but a threatening movement of the master made him rise, and with tottering steps he also departed.

And now this singular man, whom we have introduced as the hero of our drama, left alone, looked around the empty, silent hall, buttoned up his black velvet coat, fixed his hat firmly on his head, touched the spring of the great bronze gate which had closed behind him, and sallied out into the defiles of the mountain. Though he had neither guide nor light, he went on rapidly, as if led by an invisible hand.

Having passed the thick belt of trees, he looked for his horse ; but not seeing him, he listened, and soon thought he heard a distant neighing. He whistled with a peculiar modulation, and in a moment Djerid could be seen coming forward like a faithful and obedient dog. The traveller sprang to the saddle, and quickly disappeared in the darkness, which spread over the heath extending from Mont Tonnerre to Danenfels.

CHAPTER I.

THE STORM.

EIGHT days after the scene just related, about five in the evening, a carriage with four horses and two postilions left Pont-à-Mousson, a small town between Nancy and Metz. It had taken fresh horses at an inn, in spite of the recommendation of an attentive hostess who was on the look-out for belated travellers, and continued on its road to Paris. Its four horses had scarcely turned the corner of the street, when a score of children and half a score of gossips, who had watched the progress of their being put to, returned to their respective dwellings with gestures and exclamations expressive in some of great mirth, in others of great astonishment.

All this was because nothing like that carriage had for fifty years passed the bridge which good King Stanislaus threw across the Moselle to facilitate the intercourse of his little kingdom with France. We do not except even those curious vehicles of Alsace, which bring from Phalsbourg to our fairs two-headed wonders, dancing bears, and the wandering tribes of harlequins and gipsies.

In fact, without being either a child or a curious old gossip, surprise might have arrested one's steps on seeing this primitive machine, on four massive wheels, roll by with such velocity that every one exclaimed, "What a strange way of travelling post !"

As our readers, fortunately for them, did not see it pass, we shall describe it.

First, then, the principal carriage—we say principal, because in front it

was a sort of cabriolet—the principal carriage was painted light blue, and bore on its panels a baronial scroll, surmounting a J and a B entwined. Two windows—large windows, with white muslin curtains—gave it light, only these windows, invisible to the profane vulgar, looked frontwise into the cabriolet. A grating covered them, through which one might speak to the inhabitants of the carriage.

This carriage, which was eight feet long, had no light but from the windows, and no air but from a ventilator on the top; and then, to complete its oddity, a chimney rising about a foot above the roof offered to the passers-by the pleasant sight of a light cloud of smoke lengthening into a blueish trail behind it. At the present day we should only have thought it a new invention, combining the power of steam with that of horses.

This would have seemed so much the more probable, that the carriage, preceded as we have said by four horses and two postilions, was followed by one horse fastened to it by his bridle. His small head, slender legs, narrow chest, and silky mane and tail bespoke him of Arab race. He was ready saddled, which inferred that one of the travellers shut up in this Noah's ark sometimes enjoyed the pleasure of riding beside the carriage.

At Pont-à-Mousson the postilion who left had received, besides the pay for the horses, a double gratuity, presented by a strong but white hand, slipped through the leather curtains of the cabriolet, which shaded it as imperviously as the muslin ones did the carriage.

"Many thanks, my lord," said the astonished postilion, quickly taking off his cap and bowing low.

A sonorous voice replied in German (for at Nancy German is still understood, though no longer spoken), "*Schnell! Schneller!*" which means "Fast! faster!"

Postilions understand nearly all languages; above all, when accompanied by the sound of certain metals, of which it is said they are rather fond. So the two new postilions did their utmost to keep to a gallop, but after efforts which did more honour to their arms than to the powers of their horses, wearied out, they fell into a trot, getting on at the rate of two and a half or three leagues an hour.

Towards seven, they changed at Saint Mihiel; the same hand passed through the curtains payment for the last stage, and the same voice uttered a similar injunction.

There is no doubt the strange vehicle excited there the same curiosity as at Pont-à-Mousson, for as night was fast approaching, its appearance was still more fantastic.

Beyond Saint Mihiel there is a steep hill, and travellers must be satisfied to let the horses walk. It took half-an-hour to proceed a quarter of a league.

On the top the postilions stopped a moment to breathe their horses, and the travellers in the carriage, by withdrawing the curtains, might have gazed on a wide prospect, had not the mists of evening begun to veil it slightly.

The weather had been clear and warm until three in the afternoon—towards evening, however, it became oppressive. A great white cloud from the south seemed as if intentionally to follow the carriage, threatening to overtake it before it reached Bar-le-Duc, where the postilions resolved at all risks to pass the night.

The road, shut in between the hill and a rugged declivity, descended to a valley, in which was seen the winding Meuse, and was so steep, that it

was dangerous to allow the horses to do anything but walk, which prudent plan the postilions adopted. The cloud advanced, and as it brooded over, and almost touched the ground, continually extended its limits by drawing the vapours arising from the soil; so was it observed in ill-boding whiteness to overwhelm the blueish clouds which seemed to take up their station to windward, like ships preparing for an engagement. Soon, with the rapidity of the floodtide, it spread, until it hid the last rays of the sun. A dim grey light struggled through upon the scene, and although no breeze swept along, the leaves shivered, and put on the dark tinge which they assume in the deepening twilight succeeding sunset.

Suddenly a flash illuminated the cloud, the heavens burst into sheets of flame, and the startled eye might penetrate the immeasurable depths of the firmament. At the same moment the thunder rolled from tree to tree, shaking the earth, and hurrying on the vast cloud like a maddened steed. On went the carriage, sending forth its smoke, now changed in colour by the changes of the atmosphere.

In the meantime the heavens grew darker and darker, but a purple light appeared from the carriage, as if the person within, careless of the storm, had lighted a lamp, and went on with some work which he had to accomplish. The vehicle was now on a level part of the mountain, and when about to begin the descent, a peal of thunder more violent than the first rent the clouds, and the rain fell, at first in large drops, then thick and smarting, like arrows darted from the heavens.

The postilions seemed to consult together, and then stopped.

"Well!" cried the voice which had before spoken, but now in excellent French; "what the devil are you doing?"

"We were consulting whether we should go on," replied the postilions.

"I think you ought to ask me, not one another—on with you!"

The postilions obeyed, for there was that in the voice which forbade all thought of disobedience, and the carriage began to descend.

"Good!" said the voice, and the leather curtains, which had been half opened, fell between the traveller and the postilions.

But the road had become so slippery from the torrents of rain, that the horses stopped of themselves.

"Sir," said the leading postilion, "it is impossible to go any farther."

"Why?" asked the voice within.

"Because the horses only slip—they cannot get on—they will fall."

"How far are we from the next place where we change?"

"A good way, sir; four leagues."

"Well, postilion, put silver shoes on your horses, and they will get on," and as he said this the stranger opened the curtain, and held out four crowns.

"Many thanks!" said the postilion, receiving them in his broad hand, and slipping them into his great boot.

"The gentleman spoke, I think," said the other postilion, who had heard the sound of money, and did not wish to be excluded from so interesting a conversation.

"Yes, the gentleman says we must push on."

"Have you anything to say against that, my friend?" asked the traveller, in a kind voice, but with a firmness that showed he would brook no contradiction.

"Why, as to myself I have nothing to say; but the horses won't stir."

"What is the use of your spurs, then?"

"I have buried them in the sides of the poor jades, and, if it has made them move a step, may Heaven——"

He had not time to finish his oath, for a frightful peal of thunder interrupted him.

"This is no weather for Christians to be out in," said the honest fellow. "See, sir, see! the carriage is going of itself; in five minutes it will go fast enough—Jesus Dieu! there we go!"

And, in fact, the heavy machine pressing on the horses, they lost their footing. It then made a progressive movement, and, according to the mathematical increase of forces, its velocity augmented, till, with the rapidity of an arrow, it was visibly nearing the edge of a precipice.

It was not now only the voice of the traveller which was heard; his head was seen thrust out of the cabriolet.

"Stupid fellow!" cried he, "will you kill us? To the left! the leaders to the left!"

"Ah, monsieur, I wish from my heart I saw you on the left," replied the frightened postilion, vainly trying to recover the reins.

"Joseph!" cried a female voice, now first heard, "Joseph! help! help! Oh, holy Virgin!"

Indeed, danger so terrible and so imminent might well call forth that ejaculation. The carriage, impelled by its own weight, neared the precipice—already one of the leaders appeared suspended over it; three revolutions of the wheel, and horses, carriage, and postilions would all have been precipitated, crushed and mangled, to its base, when the traveller, springing from the cabriolet on the pole, seized the postilion by the collar, lifted him like a child, flung him two paces from him, leaped into the saddle, and, gathering up the reins, called to the second postilion:

"To the left, rascal, or I will blow out thy brains!"

The command acted like magic. By an extraordinary effort the postilion gave an impulse to the carriage, brought it to the middle of the road, on which it began to roll on rapidly, with a noise that contended with that of the thunder. "Gallop!" cried the traveller; "gallop! if you slacken your speed I will run you through the body and your horses, too!"

The postilion felt that this was no vain menace: he redoubled his efforts, and the carriage descended with frightful speed. As it thus passed in the night, with its fearful noise, its flaming chimney, and its stifled cries from within, it might have been taken for some infernal chariot drawn by phantom horses, and pursued by a hurricane.

But if the travellers escaped from one danger, they met another. The cloud which had hung over the valley was as rapid as the horses. From time to time, as a flash rent the darkness, the traveller raised his head, and then, by its gleam, anxiety, perhaps fear, might have been seen on his face—for dissimulation was not wanted then—God only saw him. Just as the carriage had reached level ground, and was only carried on by its own impetus, the cloud burst with an awful explosion. A violet flame, changing to green and then to white, wrapped the horses—the hind ones reared, snuffing the sulphurous air—the leaders, as if the ground had given way beneath their feet, fell flat; but almost instantly the horse upon which the postilion was mounted regained his feet, and, finding his traces snapped by the shock, he carried off his rider, who disappeared in the darkness, while the carriage, after proceeding ten yards farther, was stopped by encountering the dead body of the lightning-stricken horse.

All this was accompanied by piercing shrieks from the female in the vehicle.

There was a moment of strange confusion in which no one knew whether

he was dead or living. The traveller felt himself all over to assure himself of his own identity. He was safe and sound, but the woman had fainted.

Although he suspected this from the silence which had succeeded to her shrieks, it was not to her that his first cares were directed. Scarcely had he lighted on the ground when he hastened to the back of the vehicle.

There was the beautiful Arabian horse of which we have spoken—terrified—rigid—with every hair rising as if life were in it. He tugged violently at his fastening, shaking the door to the handle of which he was secured. His eye was fixed, the foam was on his nostrils, but after vain efforts to break away, he had remained, horror-stricken by the tempest; and when his master whistled to him in his usual manner, and put out his hand to caress him, he bounded aside, neighing, as if he did not know him.

"Ay, always that devil of a horse," muttered a broken voice from the carriage; "curse him, he has broken my wall!"

Then, with double emphasis, this voice cried in Arabic, "Be still, demon!"

"Do not be angry with Djerid, master," said the traveller, loosing the horse, which he now tied to one of the hind wheels; "he has been frightened, that is all; and indeed one might well have been frightened at less."

Saying this, he opened the carriage door, let down the step, entered, and closed the door after him.

CHAPTER II.

ALTHOTAS.

THE traveller found himself face to face with an old man with grey eyes, a hooked nose, and trembling but busy hands. He was half buried in a great chair, and turned, with his right hand, the leaves of a manuscript on parchment, called "La Chiave del Gabinetto;" in his left he held a silver skimming-dish.

His attitude, his occupation, his face, motionless and deeply wrinkled, alive only, as it were, in the eyes and mouth, may seem strange to the reader, but they were certainly very familiar to the traveller; for he scarcely cast a look on the old man, nor on all that surrounded him, and yet it was worth the trouble.

Three walls—so the old man called the sides of the carriage—were covered by shelves filled with books. These walls shut in his chair, his usual and principal seat, while above the books had been planned for his convenience several articles for holding vials, decanters, and boxes set in wooden cases as earthen and glass ware are secured at sea. He could thus reach anything without assistance, for his chair was on wheels, and with the aid of a spring he could raise it and lower it to any height necessary to attain what he wanted.

The room, for so we must call it, was eight feet long, six wide, and six high. Opposite the door was a little furnace with its shade, bellows, and tongs. At that moment there boiled in a crucible a mixture which sent out by the chimney the mysterious smoke of which we have spoken, and which excited so much surprise in old and young who saw the carriage pass.

Besides the vials, boxes, books, and papers strewed around, copper pincers were seen, and pieces of charcoal which had been dipped in various liquids; there was also a large vase half full of water, and from the roof, hung by threads, were bundles of herbs, some apparently gathered the night before, others a hundred years ago. A keen odour prevailed in this laboratory, which in one less strange would have been called a perfume.

As the traveller entered, the old man wheeled his chair with wonderful ease to the furnace, and was about to skim the mixture in the crucible attentively—nay, almost respectfully—but disturbed by the appearance of the other, he grumbled, drew over his ears his cap of velvet, once black, and from under which a few locks of silver hair peeped out. Then he sharply pulled from beneath one of the wheels of his chair the skirt of his long silk robe—a robe now nothing but a shapeless, colourless, ragged covering. The old man appeared to be in a very bad humour, and grumbled as he went on with his operation.

"Afraid,—the accursed animal! Afraid of what? He has shaken the wall, moved the furnace, spilled a quart of my elixir in the fire. Acharat, in Heaven's name, get rid of that brute in the first desert we come to!"

"In the first place," said the other, smiling, "we shall come to no deserts: we are in France. Secondly, I should not like to leave to his fate a horse worth a thousand louis d'ors, or rather, a horse above all price, for he is of the race of Al Borach."

"A thousand louis d'ors! I will give you them, or what is equal to them. That horse has cost me more than a million, to say nothing of the time, the life, he has robbed me of.

"What has he done?—poor Djerid!"

"What has he done? The elixir was boiling, not a drop escaping—true, neither Zoroaster nor Paracelsus says that none must escape, but Borri recommends it."

"Well! dear master, in a few moments more the elixir will boil again."

"Boil? See! there is a curse on it—the fire is going out. I know not what is falling down the chimney."

"I know what is falling," said the disciple, laughing; "water!"

"Water?—water? Then the elixir is ruined: the operation must be begun again—as if I had time to lose! Heaven and earth!" cried the old man, raising his hands in despair, "water! What kind of water, Acharat?"

"Pure water, master—rain from the sky. Have you not seen that it rained?"

"How should I see anything when I am at my work? Water! You see, Acharat, how this troubles my poor brain! For six months—nay, for a year—I have been asking you for a funnel for my chimney! You never think of anything—yet, what have you to do, you who are young? Thanks to your neglect, it is now the rain, now the wind, which ruins all my operations; and yet, by Jupiter! I have no time to lose! You know it—the day decreed is near; and, if I am not ready for that day—if I have not found the elixir of life—farewell to the philosopher! farewell to the wise Althotas! My hundredth year begins on the 15th of July, at eleven at night, and from this time to that, my elixir must attain perfection."

"But it is going on famously, dear master!"

"Yes, I have made some trials by absorption. My left arm, nearly paralysed, has regained its power—then, only eating, as I do, once in two or three days, and taking a spoonful of my elixir, though yet imperfect, I

have more time, and am assisted on by hope. Oh, when I think that I want but one plant, but one leaf of a plant, to perfect my elixir, and that we have perhaps passed by that plant a hundred—five hundred—a thousand times!—perhaps our horses have trodden it, our wheels crushed it, Acharat—that very plant of which Pliny speaks, and which no sage has yet found or discovered, for nothing is lost.—But stay, Acharat, you must ask its name from Lorenza in one of her trances!'

"Fear not, master! I will ask her."

"Meantime," said the philosopher, with a deep sigh, "my elixir remains imperfect, and three times fifteen days will be necessary to reach the point at which I was to-day. Have a care, Acharat, your loss will be as great as mine, if I die, and my work incomplete! But what voice is that? Does the carriage move?"

"No, master—you hear thunder."

"Thunder?"

"Yes, we have nearly all been killed by a thunderbolt; but my silk coat protected me!"

"Now, see to what your childish freaks expose me, Acharat! To die by a thunderbolt, to be stupidly killed by an electric fire that I would myself bring down from Heaven, if I had time, to boil my pot—this is not only exposing me to accidents which the malice or awkwardness of men bring on us, but to those which come from Heaven, and which may be easily prevented."

"Your pardon, master; I do not understand."

"What! did I not explain to you my system of points—my paper-kite conductor? When I have found my elixir, I shall tell it you again; but now, you see, I have not time."

"And you believe one may master the thunderbolt of heaven?"

"Certainly—not only master it, but conduct it where you choose; and when I have passed my second half century, when I shall have but calmly to await a third, I shall put a steel bridle on a thunderbolt, and guide it as easily as you do Djerid. Meantime, put a funnel on my chimney, I beg you!"

"I shall. Rest easy."

"I shall!—always the future, as if we could both look forward to the future! Oh, I shall never be understood!" cried the philosopher, writhing in his chair, and tossing his arms in despair. "'Be calm!'—he tells me to be calm; and in three months, if I have not completed my elixir, all will be over! But so that I pass my second half century—that I recover my powers of motion—I shall meet no one who says, 'I shall do'—I shall then myself exclaim, 'I have done!'"

"Do you hope to say that, with regard to our great work?"

"Yes! were I but as sure of—oh, heavens!—discovering the elixir as I am of making the diamond!"

"Then you are sure of that?"

"It is certain, since I have already made some."

"Made some?"

"Yes, look!"

"Where?"

"On your right, in the little glass vase."

The traveller anxiously seized the little crystal cup, to the bottom and sides of which adhered an almost impalpable powder.

"Diamond dust?" cried the young man.

"Yes, diamond dust—but in the middle of it?"

"Yes! yes! a brilliant of the size of a millet-seed."

"The size is nothing; we shall attain to the union of the dust, and make the grain of millet-seed a grain of hemp-seed, and of the grain of hemp-seed a pea. But first, my dear Acharat, put a funnel on my chimney, and a conductor on the carriage, that the rain may not descend through my chimney, and that the lightning may go and sport itself elsewhere."

"Yes, yes—doubt it not! Be calm!"

"Again, again, this eternal 'Be calm!' You make me swear. Youth! —mad youth!—presumptuous youth!" cried the old man, with a laugh of scorn, which showed all his toothless gums, and made his eyes sink deeper in their hollow sockets.

"Master," said Acharat, "your fire is going out, your crucible cooling. But what is in the crucible?"

"Look into it!"

The young man obeyed, uncovered the crucible, and found in it a heap of vitrified charcoal, about the size of a small seed.

"A diamond!" cried he; then, after a slight examination of it—"Yes, but stained, incomplete, valueless!"

"Because the fire was put out—because there is no funnel on the chimney."

"Let me look at it again, master," said the young man, turning in his hand the diamond, which sometimes shot forth brilliant rays, and sometimes was dull. "Good!—pardon me, and take some food."

"It is unnecessary; I took my spoonful of elixir two hours ago."

"You are mistaken, dear master; it was at six in the morning that you took it."

"Well, and what o'clock is it now?"

"Half-past eight in the evening."

"Heaven and earth!—another day past!—gone for ever! But the days are shorter than they were; there are not twenty-four hours in them now."

"If you will not eat, sleep at least for some minutes."

"Well, yes, I will sleep two hours—yes, just two hours. Look at your watch, and in two hours awake me."

"I promise to do so."

"Dost thou know, dear Acharat," said the old man in a caressing tone, "when I sleep, I always fear it will be for eternity—so in two hours you will wake me. Will you not? Promise it—swear it!"

"I swear it, master."

"In two hours?"

"In two hours!"

Just then something like the trampling of a horse was heard, and then a shout which indicated alarm and surprise.

"What does that mean?" cried the traveller; and hurriedly opening the carriage door, he leaped out.

CHAPTER III.

LORENZA FELICIANI.

WE shall now inform the reader what passed outside, whilst the philosopher and the traveller were conversing inside the carriage.

At the noise of the thunderbolt, which struck down two of the horses

and caused the other two to rear so frightfully, the lady in the cabriolet, as we have said, had fainted. She remained for some minutes motionless; then, as fear alone had caused her to swoon, by slow degrees her consciousness returned.

"Ah, heaven!" she exclaimed, "abandoned here—helpless—with no human creature to take pity on me!"

"Madame," replied a timid voice, "I am here, if I can be of any service to you."

At the sound of this voice, which seemed close to her ear, the young lady rose, put her head out between the leather curtains, and found herself face to face with a young man who was standing on the step of the cabriolet.

"It was you who spoke, sir?" said she.

"Yes, madame," answered the young man.

"And you offered me your services?"

"Yes."

"But first tell me what has happened."

"The thunderbolt, which fell almost on your carriage, broke the traces of the front horses, and one of them ran off with the postilion."

The lady looked uneasily around.

"And he who rode the hinder horses?" she asked.

"He has just got into the carriage, madame."

"Has he not been injured?"

"Not in the least."

"Are you sure?"

"He leaped from his horse, at least, like a man all safe and sound."

"Heaven be praised!" and the young lady breathed more freely. "But who are you, sir, who are here so opportunely to offer me assistance?"

"Madame, overtaken by the storm, I was down in that hollow, which is merely the entrance to a quarry, when all at once I heard a carriage coming with alarming speed. I at first supposed the horses had run off, but soon saw that they were managed by a powerful hand. Then the thunderbolt fell with a tremendous explosion, and I thought for an instant that all was over with me. Indeed, on recovering, all that I have related seemed but a dream."

"Then you are not sure that the gentleman entered the carriage?"

"Oh, yes, madame; I had quite recovered, and distinctly saw him enter."

"Make yourself certain, I entreat you, that he is in the carriage."

"But how?"

"Listen; if he be there you will hear two voices."

The young man jumped down from the step, and approached the door of the carriage.

"Yes, madame," said he, returning to her, "he is there."

The young lady, by a movement of her head, seemed to say, "It is well," but she remained for some time as if plunged in a deep reverie.

During this time the young man had leisure to examine her appearance. She was about three or four-and-twenty years of age; a brunette in complexion, but of that rich brown which is more beautiful than the most delicate tint of the rose; her fine blue eyes, raised to heaven, from which she seemed to ask counsel, shone like two stars; and her black hair, which she wore without powder, notwithstanding the fashion of the day, fell in jetty curls on her neck. All at once she roused herself, as if she had decided on her part.

"Sir," said she, "where are we now?"

"On the road from Strasbourg to Paris, madame."

"On what part of the road?"

"Two leagues from Pierrefitte."

"What is Pierrefitte?"

"A village."

"And, after Pierrefitte, what is the next stage?"

"Bar-le-Duc."

"Is it a town?"

"Yes, madame."

"A large one?"

"About four or five thousand inhabitants."

"Is there any cross-road by which one could get more directly to Bar-le-Duc?"

"No, madame—at least, I know of none."

"*Peccato!*" murmured she, falling back in the cabriolet.

The young man waited, expecting to be questioned further; but, as she kept silence, he moved a step or two away. This roused her, for, leaning out again, she called hurriedly, "Monsieur!"

The young man returned.

"I am here, madame," said he, approaching her.

"One question, if you please."

"Speak, madame."

"There was a horse behind the carriage?"

"Yes, madame."

"Is he there still?"

"No, madame; the person who got into the carriage untied him and fastened him to the wheel."

"Nothing, then, has injured the horse?"

"I think not."

"He is a valuable animal, and I should like to be sure that he is safe; but how can I reach him through this mud?"

"I can bring the horse here," said the young man.

"Oh, yes, do so, I pray; I shall be for ever grateful to you."

The young man approached the horse, who tossed his head and neighed.

"Do not be afraid," said the female; "he is as gentle as a lamb;" then, in a low voice, she murmured, "Djerid, Djerid!"

The animal evidently knew the voice to be that of his mistress, for he snorted, and stretched out his intelligent head towards the cabriolet. During this time the young man was untying him, but the horse no sooner felt his bridle in unpractised hands than at one bound he was free, and twenty paces from the carriage.

"Djerid!" repeated the young woman in her most caressing tones, "Djerid! here, here!"

The Arabian tossed his head, snuffed the air, and came towards the cabriolet, pawing as if in time to some musical air.

The lady leaned out. "Come, Djerid, come," said she.

And the obedient animal advanced towards the hand which she held out to caress him. Then with her slender hand she seized him by the mane, and sprang as lightly into the saddle as the goblin in the German ballads, who leaps behind unwary travellers and holds on by their belts.

The young man hurried towards her, but she waved him off imperiously.

"Hearken!" said she; "though young, or rather, because you are young,

you ought to be humane. Do not oppose my flight. I leave a man whom I love; but my religion is still dearer to me. That man will destroy my soul if I stay with him longer: he is an atheist and a necromancer. God has warned him by his thunders; may he profit by the warning. Tell him what I have said, and receive my blessing for what you have done for me. Farewell!"

At that word, light as a vapour, she disappeared, borne away by the aërial Djerid. The young man, seeing her flee, could not prevent a cry of astonishment escaping his lips. It was this cry which startled the traveller in the carriage.

CHAPTER IV.

GILBERT.

THE cry had, as we have said, roused the traveller. He leaped out, shut the door carefully after him, and looked uneasily around.

The first object which he beheld was the young man standing there in alarm. The lightning, which flashed incessantly, enabled him to examine him from head to foot, a practice which seemed habitual with the traveller when any unknown person or thing met his eye. He was a youth of sixteen or seventeen years old, little, thin, and muscular. His black eyes, which he fixed boldly on any object which attracted his attention, wanted mildness, but had a certain kind of beauty; his nose, small and turned up, his thin lip and projecting cheek-bones, betokened cunning and circumspection; and the strong curve of his chin announced firmness.

"Did you shout just now?" asked the traveller.

"Yes, sir."

"And why?"

"Because——" He stopped short.

"Because?" repeated the traveller.

"Sir, there was a lady in the cabriolet."

"Yes!"

And the eyes of Balsamo darted on the carriage as if they could have penetrated its sides.

"There was a horse tied to the wheel."

"Yes; where the devil is he?"

"Sir, the lady has fled on the horse."

The traveller, without uttering a word, sprang to the cabriolet, undrew the curtains, and a flash of lightning showed him it was empty.

"Sang du Christ!" shouted he, loud almost as the thunder which pealed at that moment.

Then he looked round, as if for some means of recovering the fugitives, but soon felt that it was vain.

"To try to overtake Djerid," he muttered, "with a common horse, would be to hunt the gazelle with the tortoise; but I shall know where she is, unless——"

He felt hurriedly in the pocket of his vest, and drew from it a little case, opened it, and took out of a folded paper a curl of black hair. At the sight of it the traveller's face lost its anxious expression, and his manner became calm—at least, in appearance.

"Well," said he, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, "well, and did she say nothing on leaving?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"What did she say?"

"That she quitted you not through hatred, but fear; that she is a good Christian, and that you——" He hesitated.

"And that I!"

"I know not how to tell it."

"Pardieu! tell it."

"That you are an atheist and an infidel; that God has given you a last warning by the storm; that she understood that warning, and conjures you not to be deaf to it."

A smile of contempt curled the lip of the traveller. "And this was all she said?"

"Yes, this was all."

"Well, let us speak of something else," and all trace of disquietude passed away from the traveller's countenance.

The young man remarked all these emotions reflected on his face, with a curiosity indicating no deficiency on his side of powers of observation.

"And now," said the traveller, "what is your name, my young friend?"

"Gilbert, sir."

"Gilbert!—that is merely a baptismal name.

"It is the name of our family."

"Well! my dear Gilbert, Providence has sent you to my aid."

"I shall be happy, if I can oblige you, sir."

"Thank you. At your age one is obliging for the mere pleasure of the thing; but what I am going to ask is only a trifle—merely if you can direct me to a shelter for the night?"

"Why, in the first place, there is that rock under which I was sheltering just now."

"Yes," said the traveller, "but I should like something more like a house, where I could have a good supper and a good bed."

"That would be very difficult to find."

"Are we then so far from the next village?"

"From Pierrefitte?"

"It is called Pierrefitte, then?"

"Yes, sir; it is about a league and a half off."

"A league and a half!—let us see—surely there is some habitation nearer?"

"There is the château of Taverney, about three hundred paces from this."

"Well, then——"

"What, sir!" and the young man opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Why did you not say so at once?"

"The château of Taverney is not an hotel."

"Is it inhabited?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Why, by the Baron de Taverney, of course."

"What is this Baron de Taverney?"

"He is the father of Mademoiselle Andrée, sir."

"Very pleasing intelligence, indeed; but I mean what sort of a man is he?"

"An old nobleman, sir, of sixty or sixty-five years of age: he once was rich, they say."

"Ay, and poor now!—that is the history of all those old barons. Well, show me the way to this baron's abode."

"To the Baron de Taverney's?" he asked, in alarm.

"Then you refuse?"

"No sir; but——"

"Well?"

"He will not receive you."

"He will not receive a gentleman in need of shelter?—Is he a bear, your baron?"

"Dame!" said the young man, with an expression which said plainly, "not much unlike one."

"Never mind, I'll run the risk."

"Remember, I do not advise it."

"Bah!" said the traveller, "bear as he is, he won't eat me!"

"No—but he may shut the door in your face."

"Then I'll break it open; so, if you refuse to be my guide—"

"I don't refuse, sir."

"Show me the way then."

"Willingly, sir."

The traveller leaped into the cabriolet and brought from it a little lantern. The young man hoped, as it was not lighted, that he should be obliged to open the carriage, and that then its interior would be disclosed. But the traveller did nothing of the kind: he put the lantern into Gilbert's hand.

"What shall I do with it, sir?"

"It will light you on the way, whilst I lead the horses."

"But it is not lighted."

"I am going to light it."

"Oh, you have a fire in the carriage?"

"And in my pocket," replied the traveller.

"But in this rain the tinder won't kindle."

"Open the lantern," said the traveller, smiling.

Gilbert obeyed.

"Hold your hat over my hands."

Gilbert obeyed, regarding with curiosity what followed, for he knew no other means of procuring a light than with a flint and tinder.

The traveller took from his pocket a very small silver case, drew from it a match, which he rubbed in some sort of inflammable paste, and it kindled instantly, with a slight crackling.

Gilbert started: the traveller smiled at his surprise, which was natural enough at that time, when phosphorus was only known to a few chemists, who kept the secret for their own advantage. The candle in the lantern being lighted by the match, he put up the little case. The young man followed his movements with greedy eyes; it was evident he would have given a great deal for such a treasure.

"Now that we have light, lead on."

"Follow now, then, sir;" and Gilbert advanced, whilst his companion, taking the horse by the bit, dragged him after.

The weather was now not so bad, the rain had ceased, and the thunder was only heard muttering at a distance. The traveller seemed to wish for more conversation.

"You know this baron, then, my good fellow?"

"Certainly, sir, since I have lived in his house from my infancy."

"A relation?"

"No, sir."

"Your guardian?"

"No."

"Your master?"

The young man started and coloured with anger at the word *master*—"I am not a servant, sir," said he.

"Well, but you are surely something or other?"

"I am the son of an old tenant of the baron's; my mother nursed Mademoiselle Andrée."

"I understand; being the young lady's foster-brother—for I presume she is young—you live at free quarters in the house."

"She is sixteen, sir."

Now in the traveller's last words there was something like two questions, but Gilbert avoided any reply to that which concerned himself. The traveller seemed to observe this, and gave his interrogations another turn.

"How did you happen to be out during such weather?"

"I was under a rock near the road."

"What were you doing there?"

"I was reading."

"You were reading?"

"Yes."

"What were you reading?"

"*Le Contrat Social*, by Rousseau."

The traveller looked at the young man with surprise.

"Did you get that book in the baron's library?"

"No, sir; I bought it."

"Where?—at Bar-le-Duc?"

"No, sir; from a pedlar. They roam this way now and then, and bring us some tolerably good books."

"Who told you *Le Contrat Social* was a good book?"

"I soon found that out, as I read it."

"Have you read bad books, then, that you know the difference so well?"

"Yes."

"What do you call bad books?"

"Why, *Le Sofa*, *Tanzaï*, and *Néadarne*, and books of that description."

"But where the deuce did you get such books?"

"In the baron's library."

"And how does the baron get new novels in this den of his?"

"They are sent him from Paris."

"So this poor baron spends his money on that sort of trash?"

"No; they are given him."

"Given him? By whom?"

"By one of his friends, a great nobleman."

"A great nobleman! Do you know his name."

"The Duc de Richelieu."

"What!—the old marshal?"

"Yes, the marshal."

"I take it for granted he does nor leave such books in Mademoiselle Andrée's way?"

"Indeed, sir, he leaves them in everybody's way.'

"Is Mademoiselle Andrée of your opinion," asked the traveller, with a sly smile, "that they are bad?"

"She does not read them, sir," replied Gilbert, drily.

The traveller was silent for a minute—this character, a singular mixture of shame and boldness, of good and evil, interested him in spite of himself.

"And why did you read those books when you knew they were bad?"

"Because I did not know when I began them."

"But you soon found it out?"

"Yes."

"And nevertheless you went on?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"They taught me things I did not know before."

"And *Le Contrat Social?*"

"It teaches me things that I have guessed."

"How so?"

"Why, that men are brothers—that societies in which there are serfs or slaves are ill constituted—that one day we shall all be equal."

"Oh, ho!" said the traveller. There was a short silence.

"So, my good fellow," continued the traveller in a low voice, "you wish to be instructed?"

"Yes, sir, that is my most ardent wish."

"And what do you wish to learn?"

"Everything."

"For what purpose?"

"To raise myself in the world,"

"And how high would you rise?"

Gilbert hesitated. No doubt he had his mind made up on that point, but it was evidently a secret, and he would not reveal it.

"As high as man can rise," he replied.

"Well, have you studied anything?"

"Nothing. How can I study, not being rich, and living at Taverney?"

"Then you know nothing of mathematics?"

"No."

"Nor of natural philosophy?"

"No."

"Nor of chemistry?"

"No: I know only how to read and write—but I shall know all those things."

"When?"

"Some day or other."

"But how?"

"I don't know yet."

"Strange creature!" muttered the traveller.

"And then——!" murmured Gilbert, speaking to himself.

"Well! then——?"

"Nothing."

They had now proceeded for about a quarter of an hour; the rain had ceased, and the earth sent up those odoriferous exhalations which in spring follow a great storm.

Gilbert seemed reflecting—all at once he said, "Sir, do you know the cause of storms?"

"Certainly."

"You really do!"

"Yes."

"You know the cause of the thunderbolt?"

The traveller smiled. "It is the meeting of two streams of the electric fluid—one from the clouds, the other from the earth."

Gilbert sighed. "I do not understand that," said he.

Perhaps the traveller would have explained the matter more clearly, but just then a light appeared through the trees.

"Ah! what is that?" asked the stranger.

"It is Taverney."

"We have reached it then?"

"Yes; this is the gate of the back entrance."

"Open it."

"And do you think the gate of Taverney, sir, can be opened with a push?"

"Is it a fortified place then? Knock."

Gilbert approached the gate, and timidly gave one knock.

"Pardieu! they will never hear that. Knock loudly!"

Nothing, indeed, indicated that Gilbert's knock had been heard—all was silent.

"You must take the responsibility upon yourself, sir, then," said Gilbert.

"Don't be troubled about that."

Gilbert hesitated no longer—left the knocker, and pulled a string which made a bell sound so loud, one might have heard it a mile off.

"Ma foi! if your baron does not hear that," said the traveller, "he must be deaf."

"Hark! I hear Mahon barking."

"Mahon? That is no doubt a compliment from your baron to his friend the Duc de Richelieu?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

"Mahon was the last place taken by the marshal."

"Oh, sir, I told you I know nothing," and Gilbert sighed again.

These sighs revealed to the stranger some hidden ambition, some secret cause of pain.

A step was heard. "Here is some one at last," said the stranger.

"It is Master la Brie," said Gilbert.

The gate opened, but La Brie, taken by surprise at seeing the stranger and the carriage when he expected no one but Gilbert, would have shut it again.

"Excuse me, my friend, but I have come here purposely, and you must not shut the door in my face."

"But, sir, I must tell the baron that an unexpected visitor——"

"Never mind—I shall run the risk of his looking a little cross at me; but he shall not turn me out, I can tell you, until I have got warmed, dried, and fed. They say you have good wine in this part of the country—do you happen to know?"

La Brie, instead of replying, was going to make farther resistance, but it was in vain; the traveller pushed in, and Gilbert closed the gate after him, the two horses and carriage being in the avenue. La Brie, seeing himself vanquished, proceeded as quickly as his old limbs would permit towards the house, to announce his own defeat, shouting with all his strength, "Nicole Legay, Nicole Legay!"

"Who is this Nicole!" asked the stranger, calmly making his way to the house.

"Nicole Legay, sir?" replied Gilbert, with symptoms of some inward emotion.

"Yes—she whom Master la Brie is calling!"

"Mademoiselle Andrée's waiting-maid, sir."

In the meantime, in answer to the calls of La Brie, a light appeared under the trees, borne by a beautiful young girl.

"What do you want, La Brie? What is all this fuss?" asked she.

"Quick, Nicole," cried the quivering voice of the old man "run and tell the baron a strange gentleman is come to ask shelter."

Nicole did not wait to be told twice, but flew off towards the château so quickly that in a moment she was out of sight.

As to La Brie, having thus satisfied himself that the baron should not be taken by surprise, he stopped and took breath.

The message soon produced an effect. A sharp commanding voice was heard from the house, repeating, with an accent by no means indicating a wish to be hospitable—"A strange gentleman? Who is he?—people don't come in that way without sending up their names!"

"Is it the baron himself?" asked he who was the cause of all the disturbance.

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the poor frightened old man, "you hear what he says?"

"He asks my name, I think?"

"Yes. I forgot to ask it, sir."

"Say, the Baron Joseph Balsamo. Our titles being the same, he will perhaps not be so angry."

La Brie, a little emboldened by the rank of the stranger, announced him as he requested.

"Well," grumbled the voice from the house, "since he is there, he must come in. Here, sir—this way—this way."

The stranger advanced quickly; but just as he reached the foot of the stone steps leading up to the door, he turned to see whether Gilbert were there or not. Gilbert had disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

THE BARON DE TAVERNEY.

ALTHOUGH in some degree forewarned by Gilbert of the poverty of the Baron de Taverney, the person who had caused himself to be announced as the Baron Joseph Balsamo could not help being surprised at the miserable appearance of the abode called by Gilbert, with emphasis, a château.

The house was built in the form of an oblong square of one story in height, with a square tower at each corner. Its irregular appearance had, however, something pleasing and picturesque, seen by the pale light of the moon, shining out from between the huge masses of the clouds left by the storm. There were six windows in the low building, and two in each tower—that is, one window in each of its stories. A broad flight of steps led up to the hall-door, but they were so broken and rugged that they seemed rather a sort of precipice than a staircase.

Such was the dwelling, on the threshold of which the stranger was received by the Baron de Taverney, in his dressing-gown, and holding a candlestick in his hand. The baron was a little old man of from sixty to sixty-five years of age, with a keen eye and a high retreating forehead. He wore an old wig, which from frequent accidents with the candles on the mantelpiece had lost all the curls which the rats, which frequented his

"THE STRANGER WAS RECEIVED BY THE BARON DE TAVERNEY, IN HIS DRESSING-GOWN."

wardrobe, had left it. He held in his hand a napkin of very dubious whiteness, which indicated that he had been disturbed when going to sit down to supper.

In his malicious countenance, which slightly resembled that of Voltaire, two expressions struggled for mastery—politeness required a smile for his guest, but vexation turned it to a rather decided atrabilious sneer. And thus lighted as he was by the candle in his hand, the flickering of which disturbed his features, the Baron de Taverney could not well be called anything but a very ugly nobleman.

"Sir," said he, "may I know to what fortunate circumstance I owe the pleasure of seeing you?"

"Simply, sir, to the storm, which frightened my horses and caused them very nearly to destroy my carriage; one of my postilions was thrown from his horse, the other galloped off with his, and I know not what I should have done, had I not met a young man who conducted me to your château, assuring me that your hospitality was well known."

The baron raised his light to endeavour to discover the unlucky wight who had, by this piece of information, been the cause of the unwelcome visit. Balsamo also looked around for his guide, but he had retired.

"And do you know the name of the young man who pointed out my château?" asked the Baron de Taverney, as if he wanted to return him thanks.

"Gilbert, I think, is his name."

"Ha! Gilbert! I scarcely thought him fit even for that—an idle dog! —a philosopher, you must know, sir!"

The threatening tone in which these epithets were uttered showed that there was little sympathy between the lord and his vassal.

"However, sir," said the baron, after a moment's silence, as expressive as his words, "will you be good enough to enter?"

"Allow me first, sir, to see after my carriage, which contains some very valuable articles."

"La Brie!" cried the baron, "La Brie! get some assistance, and put the gentleman's carriage under the shed in the yard—there are still some laths of a roof there. I can't answer for your horses, however, getting a good feed, but as they are not yours, but the postmaster's, you need not care very much."

"In truth, sir," said the traveller, beginning to get impatient, "I fear that I am giving you quite too much trouble."

"Not at all, sir—not at all—no trouble to me—but you will be rather poorly lodged, I warn you."

"Sir, I assure you I feel exceedingly grateful."

"Pray, do not deceive yourself as to what we can do for you," said the baron, raising his candle, so as to throw its rays in the direction where Balsamo was assisting La Brie to wheel his carriage under the shed, and elevating his voice in proportion as his guest retreated—"Pray do not deceive yourself—Taverney is a dull abode, a wretched place!"

The traveller was too busy to reply; he chose the best covered part of the shed to shelter the carriage, and having pointed it out to La Brie, slipped a louis-d'or into his hand, and returned to the baron.

La Brie put the louis in his pocket, supposing it only a crown, and thanking heaven for his good fortune.

"Heaven forbid I should think so ill of your château as you speak of it!" said Balsamo, bowing to the baron, who, as the only proof of the truth of his assertion, shook his head, and led the guest through a wide,

damp antechamber, grumbling as he proceeded—"Oh, all very good! but I know what I am saying—I know, unfortunately, my own means, and I assure you they are very limited. If you are a Frenchman, sir—but your German accent shows you are not, and yet your name is Italian, but that is no matter—if you are a Frenchman, I repeat, the name of Taverney may recall some recollections of splendour—it was once called Taverney the rich!"

Balsamo expected a sigh at this conclusion, but there was none. "Philosophy!" thought he.

"This way, this way!" cried the baron, opening the dining-room door. "Hola! Maitre la Brie! wait at supper, now, as if you were yourself a hundred footmen in one!"

La Brie bustled about in obedience to this command.

"I have no servant but this, sir," said Taverney; "he is a very bad one, but I have not the means of getting a better. The fool has been with me twenty years without getting a penny of wages. I feed him about as well as he waits on me. He is an ass, you see!"

Balsamo continued to study this character. "No heart," thought he; "yet perhaps all this is merely affectation."

The baron shut the door of the dining-room, and then, as he held his light high above his head, the traveller saw distinctly its size and its furniture.

It was a large, low hall, which had formerly been the principal apartment of a small farm-house, raised by its owner to the rank of a château. It was so scantily furnished, that, at the first glance, it appeared empty Straw chairs, with carved backs, some engravings from the battle-pieces of Lebrun, framed in black varnished wood, and a large oak cupboard, dark with age and smoke, were all its ornaments. In the middle stood a little round table on which was a dish of partridges and cabbage. The wine was in a stone jar, and the plate, unpolished, worn, and battered, consisted of three covers, one tankard and one salt-cellar—but this last article was very massive, exquisitely chased, and looked like a diamond among worthless pebbles.

"There, sir, there!" said the baron, offering a seat to his guest, whose scrutinising look on all around did not escape him. "Oh, you are looking at my saltcellar. You admire it. Good taste,—and very polite, too, for you fix on the only thing here worth looking at. I assure you, sir, I am particularly obliged. But, no, I forgot—I have one other valuable commodity—my daughter!"

"Mademoiselle Andrée?" said Balsamo.

"Faith, yes! Mademoiselle Andrée!" said the host, surprised that his guest was so well informed. "I shall present you to her. Andrée! Andrée! come hither, child—don't be afraid."

"I am not afraid, father," answered a sweet and clear voice, and a tall and beautiful girl entered the room, in a manner perfectly unembarrassed, and yet quite free from forwardness.

Joseph Balsamo, though, as we have seen, perfectly master of himself, could not prevent an involuntary bow at sight of all-powerful beauty like hers. Andrée de Taverney seemed indeed sent to adorn and brighten all around her. She had dark auburn hair, of a rather lighter shade at her temples and neck, black eyes—clear, with dilated pupils—and a steady and majestic look, like that of an eagle, yet the mildness of that look was inexpressible. Her small mouth, formed like Apollo's bow, was brilliant as coral; her tapering hands were antique in form, as were her arms, and dazzlingly fair. Her figure, flexible and firm, was like that of the statue

of some pagan goddess to which a miracle had given life. Her foot might bear a comparison with that of the huntress Diana, and it seemed only by a miracle that it could support the weight of her body. Her dress was of the simplest fashion, yet suited her so well, that it seemed as if one from the wardrobe of a queen would not have been so elegant or so rich.

All these details were perceived by Balsamo in the first glance, as the young lady passed from the door to the table. On his side, the baron had not lost a single impression produced on the mind of his guest by the rare union of perfections in his daughter.

"You were right," whispered Balsamo, turning to his host, "Mademoiselle Andrée is perfection."

"Do not flatter poor Andrée, sir," said the baron, carelessly; "she has just returned home from her convent, and she will believe all you say—not that I am afraid of her coquetry—on the contrary, the dear child is not enough of a coquette, but, like a good father, I am cultivating in her that first and most important quality for a woman."

Andrée looked down and blushed; although she tried to avoid listening, she could not but overhear her father's words.

"Did they tell mademoiselle that at the convent?" asked Joseph Balsamo, laughing; "and was that precept part of the instructions of the nuns?"

"Sir," replied the baron, "I have my own way of thinking on particular subjects, as you may see."

This was so self-evident that Balsamo merely bowed in assent.

"No," continued he, "I do not imitate those fathers who say to their daughters, 'Be prudes, be rigid, be blind—think of nothing but honour, delicacy, devotion.' Fools! It is as if the fathers of the knights of old had sent those champions into the lists—after having taken off all their armour—to fight an adversary armed cap-à-pie. Pardieu! that is not the way I shall bring up my daughter Andrée, though she be brought up in this miserable den."

Although Balsamo perfectly agreed with the baron as to the propriety of this last epithet, yet he deemed it polite to contradict it.

"Oh, all very well," resumed the old man, "but I know the place, I tell you. Yet, though now so far from the sun of Versailles, my daughter shall know the world which I formerly knew so well myself; and if she enter it, it shall be with an arsenal of weapons forged by my experience and my recollections. But I must confess, sir, the convent has ruined all my plans. As if that was what I wanted, my daughter was the first boarder who really practised the precepts there taught, and followed the letter of the Gospel. Corbleu! was not that being prettily served?"

"Mademoiselle is an angel," replied Balsamo, "and in truth, sir, what you say does not surprise me."

Andrée bowed her thanks for this compliment, and sat down in obedience to a look from her father.

"Be seated, baron," said the host, "and if you are hungry, eat. What a horrible ragout that fool La Brie has given us!"

"Partridges! Do you call that horrible?" said the guest, smiling. "You slander your supper. Partridges in May! Are they from your own estates?"

"My estates! it is long since I had one. My respectable father left me some land indeed, but it was eaten and digested long enough ago. Oh, Heaven be praised! I have not an inch of ground. That good-for-nothing Gilbert, who can only read and dream, must have stolen a gun, powder,

and shot from some one or other, and he kills birds, poaching on the estates of my neighbours. He will be caught and sent to the galleys some day, and certainly I shall not interfere—it will be a good riddance; but Andrée likes game, so I am obliged to overlook Monsieur Gilbert's freaks."

Balsamo watched Andrée's lovely face as this was said, but not a change, not the slightest blush, disturbed it.

He was seated at table between her and the baron, and she helped him, without appearing in the least annoyed at the scantiness of the repast, to a portion of the dish procured by Gilbert and cooked by La Brie, and so heartily abused by the baron. During this time poor La Brie, who heard all the eulogiums passed on himself and Gilbert, handed the plates with a deprecating air, which became quite triumphant at each word of praise the guest bestowed on his cookery.

"He has not even salted his abominable ragout!" cried the baron, after he had devoured two wings of a partridge, which his daughter had placed before him on a tempting layer of cabbage. "Andrée, pass the saltcellar to the Baron Balsamo."

Andrée obeyed, extending her arm with exquisite grace.

"Ah, you are admiring the saltcellar again!" said the host.

"No, sir, you are wrong this time," replied Balsamo; "I was admiring mademoiselle's hand."

"Ah! very good indeed—a perfect Richelieu! But since you have the saltcellar in your own hand, examine it; it was made for the regent by the goldsmith Lucas. It represents the loves of the satyrs and bacchantes—a little free, but pretty."

Balsamo saw that the little figures so admirably executed were something worse than free, and he could not but admire the unconsciousness with which Andrée had offered him the saltcellar.

But as if the baron had determined to put to the proof that innocence which carries with it such a charm, he began to point out in detail the beauties of his favourite piece of plate, in spite of all Balsamo's efforts to change the conversation.

"Come, eat, baron," said Taverney, "for I warn you there is no other dish. Perhaps you are expecting the roast and other removes; if so, great will be your disappointment."

"Pardon me, sir," said Andrée, in her usual calm manner, "but if Nicole has rightly understood me, we shall have another dish. I have given her the receipt for one."

"The receipt! you have given a receipt to your maid! the femme-de-chambre turned cook! It only requires one step more—turn cook yourself, I beg you! Did the Duchess de Châteauroux or the Marchioness de Pompadour ever cook for the king? On the contrary, it was he who dressed omelets for them. Jour de Dieu! have I lived to see women cooking in my house? Baron, excuse my daughter, I beseech you."

"But, father, we must eat," said Andrée quietly. "Well, Legay," added she in a louder tone, "is it done?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," replied the maid, bringing in a dish of a very tempting odour.

"I know one at least who will not eat of that dish!" said the baron, furious, and breaking his plate as he spoke.

"Perhaps *you* will eat some, sir?" said Andrée coldly. Then, turning to her father, "You know, sir, we have now only seven plates of that set which my mother left me;" and, so saying, she proceeded to carve the

smoking viands which Mademoiselle Legay, the pretty waiting-maid, had just placed on the table.

CHAPTER VI.

ANDRÉE DE TAVERNEY.

THE searching intellect of Balsamo found ample food for study in each detail of the strange and isolated life led by this family in a corner of Lorraine.

The saltcellar alone revealed to him one phase of the baron's character, or rather his character in all its bearings. He called up all his penetration, therefore, as he scrutinised the features of Andrée whilst she handed him that saltcellar.

At length, whether moved by curiosity or some deeper feeling, Balsamo gazed on Andrée so fixedly, that two or three times, in less than ten minutes, the eyes of the young girl met his. At first she bore his look without confusion, but its intensity became by degrees so great that a feverish impatience, which made the blood mount to her cheeks, took possession of her; then, feeling that this look had something supernatural in its power, she tried to brave it, and, in her turn, she gazed at the baron with her large, limpid, dilated eyes. But this time again she was obliged to yield, and, filled with the magnetic fluid which flowed in streams from his flaming orbs, her eyelids weighed down, sunk timidly, no longer to be raised but with hesitation.

Whilst this silent struggle went on between the young girl and the mysterious traveller, the baron grumbled, laughed, found fault, and swore like a true country gentleman, and pinched La Brie whenever he was within his reach, feeling that he must vent his spleen on some one. He was going to do the same to Nicole, when his eyes, for the first time no doubt, rested on the hands of the young waiting-maid. The baron was an adorer of fine hands—all his youthful follies might be attributed to the power of a fine hand over him.

"Only see!" cried he, "what pretty fingers this little rogue has! how the nail tapers—it would bend over the tip!—a great beauty if washing bottles and cutting wood did not wear down the horn; for it is horn you have at the ends of your fingers, Mademoiselle Nicole."

Not accustomed to compliments from her master, Nicole looked at him with a half smile, in which there was more astonishment than gratification.

"Yes, yes," said the baron, who saw what passed in the mind of the young flirt, "turn away—play the coquette, I beg of you; but I must inform you, my dear guest, that Mademoiselle Nicole Legay, this young lady here present, is not a prude like her mistress, and is not at all afraid of a compliment."

Balsamo turned quickly towards the baron's daughter, and saw an expression of supreme disdain on her handsome features; then, thinking it right to adapt his expression to hers, he looked haughtily away, at which Andrée seemed pleased, and regarded him with less sternness, or rather with less uneasiness, than before.

"Would you think, sir," continued the baron, chucking Nicole under the chin, "would you think that this damsel had been in a convent with my daughter, and is really what one might call educated? Oh! Made-

Mademoiselle Nicole would not quit her mistress for a moment. There is a devotedness in her which would greatly delight the philosophers who maintain that these creatures have souls."

"Sir," said Andrée, displeased, "it is not devotedness which prevents Nicole from leaving me; it is because I order her to remain."

Balsamo raised his eyes to Nicole, to see the effect of these contemptuous words, and he observed, from her compressed lips, that she was not insensible to the humiliations to which her position of domestic exposed her. But the emotion was transitory; for, in turning away to hide it, her eyes rested with interest on a window of the room which looked into the courtyard. Everything roused the curiosity of Balsamo, and, as he followed her eyes, he thought he saw what interested her—the face of a man at the window. "In truth," thought he, "every one has a mystery in this house, and I hope soon to know Mademoiselle Andrée's. I have found out the baron's, and I guess what Nicole's is." Whilst thus communing with himself, the baron observed his absence of mind.

"You are in a reverie, my dear guest," said he. "Well, it is infectious here—it attacks every one. Let me reckon: first, Mademoiselle de Taverney falls into reveries; then Mademoiselle Nicole does the same; then the good-for-nothing fellow who shot the partridges is in a perpetual reverie, and very likely the partridges were in a reverie when he shot them."

"Gilbert?" asked Balsamo.

"Yes. Oh, a philosopher like Monsieur la Brie here! But excuse me; perhaps you are a friend of theirs? If so, I warn you you will be none of mine."

"No, sir; I am neither for them nor against them," replied Balsamo. "I know nothing of them."

"Ventrebleu! so much the better. They are wretches as mischievous as they are ugly; the monarchy will be ruined by their opinions. No one laughs now; they read, they read! And what, I pray you? Sentiments like this: *Under a monarchical government it is difficult for a people to be virtuous;* or this: *Monarchy is an institution invented for the corruption of the morals of men, and the purpose of enslaving them;* or else this: *If the power of kings comes from God, it comes as diseases and other scourges of the human race come from him.* You call that improving, I hope! A virtuous people! Now, I ask you, of what use would they be? Everything has gone wrong since the king spoke to Voltaire and read Diderot!"

At this moment Balsamo thought he saw the pale face, which he had seen before, again appear at the window; but it vanished when he looked in that direction.

"Is mademoiselle a philosopher?" asked Balsamo, turning to Andrée, with a smile.

"I don't even know what philosophy is," replied Andrée. "I like what is serious."

"Ha! mademoiselle!" cried the baron, "then, in my opinion, nothing is more serious than good living—like that, I pray you."

"But mademoiselle does not hate life, I presume?" said Balsamo.

"That depends on circumstances," replied Andrée.

"What a stupid phrase," exclaimed the baron; "would you believe it, sir, my son once made me, word for word, a similar reply?"

"You have a son then, sir?"

"Oh, mon Dieu! sir, yes! I have that misfortune. The Chevalier

de Taverney, lieutenant in the body-guard of the Dauphin—a most excellent young man!" And the baron uttered these four words as if he would have crushed each letter in them.

"I congratulate you, sir," said Balsamo, with a bow.

"Oh yes! another philosopher, sir! Upon the honour of a gentleman, it is sickening! Did he not speak to me the other day about giving the negroes their freedom! 'And what about sugar?' asked I, 'for I like my coffee very sweet, and so does Louis XV.' 'Sir,' replied he, 'is it not better to go without sugar than to make a whole race suffer?' 'A race of monkeys,' said I, and I think it was saying a great deal in their praise. Well! What do you think he said next?—ma foi! there must be something in the air to turn people's heads! He replied to me, 'that all men were brothers!' I the brother of a Hottentot!"

"Oh, that was going rather far!"

"Hey! what do you think of that? I am in great luck with my two children, am I not? No one will say that I shall be truly represented in my descendants. The sister is an angel—the brother an apostle! Drink, sir, drink! The wine is detestable!"

"I think it exquisite,' said Balsamo, still looking at Andrée.

"Then you *are* a philosopher! Take care, or I shall order my daughter to preach you a sermon. But, no, philosophers have no religion. Still, religion was a very convenient thing—one believed in God and the king, and all was settled. Now people believe in neither one nor the other—they must know so much—read so much—I prefer never doubting. In my time, our only study was to amuse ourselves—to play at faro and dice, and to fence—we ruined duchesses, and were ruined by opera dancers—that was my history to a tittle! The whole of Taverney went to the opera. It is the only thing I regret, for a ruined man is not worth the name of man. You think me old, don't you? Well, it is because I am ruined, and live in this den; because my wig is shabby, and my coat a relic of antiquity. But look at my friend, the marshal, with his coats of the newest cut, and his well-curled wig, and his ten thousand a-year. He looks young, fresh, and gay, and yet he is ten years older than I, sir!—ten years, I assure you!"

"You speak of Monsieur de Richelieu?"

"Yes, the same."

"The duke?"

"Why, faith, not the cardinal, I think—I do not go quite so far back. Besides, the cardinal never did what his nephew did; he did not last so long."

"I am surprised that, with such powerful friends at court, you should have left it."

"Oh, a temporary retreat! I shall return to it some day or other," and the old baron cast a singular look on his daughter. Balsamo did not allow it to pass unnoticed.

"But," said he, "the marshal might at least advance your son?"

"My son! He hates him."

"Hates the son of his friend?"

"He is quite right."

"And do *you* say so, sir?"

"Pardieu! I tell you he is a philosopher—he abhors him!"

"And Philip returns him the compliment," said Andrée, with perfect calmness. "Remove these things, Legay!"

The young girl, roused from her fixed contemplation of the window, hastened to obey.

"Ah," said the baron, sighing, "one used to sit after supper till two in the morning—we had what was fit to eat then, and when the eating was over, we drank. But how drink this stuff, when we are not occupied in eating? Legay, bring a flask of Maraschino, if there be one."

"Do so," said Andrée, for the maid seemed to wait for her orders before obeying those of the baron.

The baron threw himself back in his chair, shut his eyes, and sighed with a grotesque sort of melancholy.

"You were speaking of the Marshal de Richelieu," said Balsamo, who appeared not inclined to let the conversation drop.

"Yes," said Taverney, "I was speaking of him," and he hummed an air as melancholy as his sighs.

"If he hate your son, and if he be right to hate him because he is a philosopher, he must retain all his friendship for you, since you are not one."

"Philosopher! no, heaven be praised!"

"You must surely have claims on the administration? You have served the king?"

"Fifteen years. I was the marshal's aide-de-camp—we served together in the campaign of Mahon. Our friendship is of long standing—let me see: it began at the siege of Philipsbourg—that was in the year 1742 or '43."

"So," said Balsamo, "you were at the siege of Philipsbourg? I was there myself."

The old man sat upright in his chair and stared at the stranger.

"Excuse me; but what is your age, my respected guest?"

"Oh, I am not old," said Balsamo, holding out his glass to be filled with Maraschino by the fair hand of Andrée.

The baron interpreted the stranger's answer in his own way, and concluded that Balsamo had some reason for concealing his age.

"Sir," said he, "allow me to say that you do not appear to be old enough to have served at Philipsbourg—that siege took place twenty-eight years ago, and you seem to be about thirty."

"Oh, anybody might be taken for thirty."

"Pardieu, then, I wish *I* could; it is just thirty years since I was that age."

Mademoiselle Andrée gazed with increasing and irresistible curiosity on the stranger, for every word revealed him in a new light.

"You astonish me, sir," said the baron. "Unless you are all this time mistaken in the name, and are thinking of some other town than Philipsbourg. I should say you were not more than thirty; would not you, Andrée, say the same?"

"Yes, indeed," replied she, trying to bear the powerful eye of their guest, but this time again in vain.

"No, no," said the latter, "I mean what I say—I mean the famous siege of Philipsbourg, at which the Duc de Richelieu killed his cousin, the Prince de Lixen, in a duel. The affair took place as they were returning from the trenches, on the high road; he ran his sword right through his body! I passed just as he expired in the arms of the Prince de Deux Buts; he was seated against the side of a ditch when Richelieu was coolly wiping his sword."

"On my honour, you amaze me, sir," said the baron; "it occurred precisely as you say."

"You have heard the affair described?" asked Balsamo, coolly.

"I was there. I had the honour of being second to the marshal; he was not marshal then, but that is no matter."

"Let me think," said Balsamo, turning and gazing firmly on him—"Were you not then a captain?"

"Precisely."

"You were in the queen's regiment of light horse, which was cut to pieces at Fontenoy?"

"Perhaps you were at Fontenoy, too?" asked the baron, endeavouring to jest.

"No," replied Balsamo; "I was dead at that time."

The baron stared—Andrée started—Nicole crossed herself.

"But to return to what we were saying. You wore the uniform of the light horse, I remember perfectly, at that time; I saw you as I passed; you were holding your own and the marshal's horse, whilst they fought. I went up to you and asked you about the duel—you gave me the details."

"I?"

"Yes, you, pardieu!—I recognise you now—you bore the title of chevalier—they called you *the little chevalier*."

"Mordieu!" cried the baron, all amazed.

"Excuse me that I did not sooner recognise you; but thirty years change a man. Let us drink the marshal's health, my dear baron."

He raised his glass, and drained it to the last drop.

"You saw me there?" cried the baron; "impossible!"

"I saw you," said Balsamo.

"On the high road?"

"On the high road."

"Holding the horses?"

"Holding the horses."

"Whilst the duel was going on?"

"As the prince was expiring, I said."

"Then you are fifty."

"I am old enough to have seen what I tell you."

The baron threw himself back in his chair, but in so ridiculous a pet that Nicole could not help laughing. Andrée, instead of laughing, seemed to be in a reverie, her eyes open, and fixed on those of Balsamo. He appeared now to have attained his object. Suddenly rising, he sent from his flaming eyeball two or three lightning flashes full on her. She started, as if from an electric shock. Her arms stiffened, her neck bent, she smiled, yet as if involuntarily, on the stranger, then closed her eyes.

"Do you also, mademoiselle, believe I speak falsely when I say that I was present at the siege of Philipsbourg?"

"No, sir, I believe you," she articulated, making a violent effort.

"Then it is I who am only a dotard," said the baron; "the gentleman no doubt has come back from the other world!"

Nicole gazed on him with horror.

"Who knows?" replied Balsamo, in so solemn a tone that he was yet more horrified.

"Well, then, baron," resumed the old man, "to have done with jesting, are you really more than thirty?—you do not look more!"

"Sir," said Balsamo, "would you believe me if I told you a very incredible thing?"

"I do not promise that," said the baron, looking knowing, whilst Andrée listened with eager attention. "I am very incredulous, I must candidly warn you."

"What use is there, then, in putting a question, when you will not listen to my reply?"

"Well, I will believe you. There!—are you satisfied?"

"Then, sir, I have only to repeat what I have told you, and to add that I knew you personally at the siege of Philipsbourg."

"Then you must have been a child?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Four or five years old at most?"

"No, I was forty-one."

The baron burst into a loud fit of laughter, which Nicole re-echoed.

"I told you you would not believe me," said Balsamo, gravely.

"But how is it possible to believe that? at least, give me some proofs."

"That is easy. I was forty-one then, but I do not say that I was the man I am."

"Oh," cried the baron, "this is going back to paganism. Was there not a philosopher—for those wretches flourished in every century—was there not a Greek philosopher who would not eat beans because he pretended they had had souls, as my son says negroes have—who was he?—what the deuce was his name?"

"Pythagoras," said Andrée.

"Yes, Pythagoras; the Jesuits taught me that. Father Porée made me compose Latin verses on it, with little Arouet. I remember they thought mine much the best. Pythagoras?—yes."

"Well, how do you know that I am not Pythagoras?" replied Balsamo, quietly.

"I do not deny that you may be Pythagoras, but Pythagoras was not at the siege of Philipsbourg; at least, I did not see him there."

"No; but you saw the Viscount Jean des Barreaux, who was in the black musketeers."

"Yes, I knew him well, but he was no philosopher, although he did hate beans, and never ate them when he could help it."

"Well! Do you recollect, the day after the duel, Des Barreaux was in the trenches with you?"

"Yes, perfectly well."

"For you know the black musketeers and the light horse always mounted guard together, every seven days."

"True enough. What next?"

"That very evening the grape-shot fell like hail, and Des Barreaux was dull; he asked you for a pinch of snuff, and you offered him your gold box."

"On which was the likeness of a female?"

"Exactly. I see her now. She was fair, was she not?"

"Mordieu!" cried the baron, terrified, "you are right. Well, then?"

"Well, then," continued Balsamo, "as he was taking that pinch of snuff, a ball carried off his head, just in the same way that Marshal Berwick's was carried away formerly."

"Alas! yes, I remember," said the baron; "poor Des Barreaux!"

"And now, sir, you see I must have seen and known you at the siege of Philipsbourg, since I was that very Des Barreaux."

The baron fell back once more in his chair, almost stupefied at these words; but, recovering, he cried, "Why, this is sorcery—magic! A hundred years ago you would have been burnt, my dear guest. Upon my honour, I think I can smell a sort of corpse-like odour!"

"Sir," said Balsamo, "no true sorcerer or magician has ever yet been

burnt; it is fools who have anything to do with the faggot. But a truce to this conversation. Mademoiselle de Taverney is asleep; it seems that metaphysics and the occult sciences have few attractions for her."

In fact, Andrée, overcome by an unknown irresistible power, felt her head sink on her breast, like a flower whose cup bends under its weight of dew.

At the last words of Balsamo, she made an effort to shake off the influence that like a subtle fluid stole upon her. She shook her head, arose, seemed about to fall, but, supported by Nicole, left the dining-room. At the same moment the face which had been looking in at the window, and which Balsamo had long ago recognised as Gilbert's, also disappeared. An instant after he heard Andrée begin to play with vigour on her harpsichord. He had followed her with his eye as she left the room, and could not help exclaiming triumphantly, as she disappeared, "I may say, like Archimedes, *Eureka!*"

"Archimedes! Who was he?" asked the baron.

"A good sort of a fellow—a savant whom I knew two thousand one hundred and fifty years ago," said Balsamo.

CHAPTER VII.

EUREKA.

WHETHER this piece of extravagance was too much for the baron, whether he had not heard it, or whether, having heard it, he thought it best to get rid of his strange guest, we know not, but he made no reply to it; but when the sound of Andrée's harpsichord proved that she was engaged in the next apartment, he offered to procure Balsamo the means of proceeding to the nearest town.

"I have an old horse who, though on his last legs, will carry you so far; and you would at least procure good lodgings. There is, indeed, a room and a bed at Taverney; but my ideas of hospitality are rather peculiar—'*good or none*' is my motto."

"Then you wish to send me away!" said Balsamo, hiding his vexation under a smile. "That is treating me like an intruder."

"No, indeed; it is treating you like a friend, my dear guest. Lodging you here would be really treating you as an enemy. I say this in all conscience, but with great regret, for I am delighted with your society."

"Then, pray do not force me to rise when I am tired—to get on horseback when I would rather stretch my limbs in bed. Do not represent your hospitable resources as worse than they are, if you would not have me believe that I have been so unfortunate as to incur your dislike."

"Oh!" said the baron, "since you view the matter in that light, you shall stay."

Then looking round for La Brie, who was in a corner, he cried, "Come hither, you old rascal!" La Brie advanced a few steps timidly. "Ventre-bleu! come hither, I say! Is the red room fit to accommodate a gentleman, think you?"

"Oh, certainly, sir," replied the old servant; "you know it is occupied by M. Philip when he comes to Taverney."

"It may do very well for a poor devil of a lieutenant who comes to pass

a month with a ruined father, and at the same time very unfit for a rich nobleman who travels post with four horses!"

"I assure you," said Balsamo, "I shall be perfectly content with it."

The baron grinned, as if he would have said, "I know better;" then he added aloud, "La Brie, show the stranger to the red room, since he is determined to be cured of all wish to return to Taverney. Well, you have decided to stay, I suppose?" said he, turning to Balsamo.

"Yes—if you permit it."

"Stay! there are still other means."

"Means for what?"

"To avoid having to make the journey on horseback."

"What journey?"

"To Bar-le-Duc."

Balsamo waited quietly to hear this new plan developed.

"You were brought here by post-horses, were you not?"

"Yes, unless Satan brought me."

"I at first almost suspected he did, for you do not seem to be on bad terms with him."

"You do me infinitely more honour than I deserve."

"Well, the horses that brought your carriage could now take it away?"

"No; there are only two horses left of the four, and the carriage is heavy. Besides, post-horses must rest."

"Ha! another reason. You are determined, I see, to remain."

"Because I wish to see you again to-morrow, and express my gratitude to you for your hospitality."

"That you could easily repay."

"How?"

"Since you are on such good terms with his satanic majesty, beg him to permit me to discover the philosopher's stone."

"Why, M. le Baron, if you really wish for it——"

"The philosopher's stone! Parbleu! if I really wish for it!"

"In that case you must apply to another individual than the devil."

"To whom, then?"

"To ME! as I heard Corneille say about a hundred years ago, when he was reciting me a part of one of his comedies."

"Ha! La Brie, you old rascal!" cried the baron, who began to find the conversation rather dangerous at such an hour, and with such a man, "try and find a wax candle, and light the gentleman to his room."

La Brie hastened to obey, and during this search, almost as dubious in its result as that for the philosopher's stone, he desired Nicole to precede him upstairs and air the red room. Nicole being gone, Andrée was delighted to find herself alone. She felt as if she required to reflect. The baron bid Balsamo good-night, and retired to bed.

Balsamo looked at his watch, for he remembered the promise he had made to Althotas—a promise now impossible to fulfil, the two hours having expired. He asked La Brie if the carriage was still in the place he had pointed out. La Brie replied that unless it would move away of itself, it must be there. He then asked what had become of Gilbert. La Brie assured him that the lazy fellow was no doubt in bed two hours ago. Then, after having studied the topography of the passage which led to the red room, Balsamo went out to waken Althotas.

The Baron de Taverney had not spoken falsely respecting the discomfort of this apartment; it was as poorly furnished as all the other rooms of the château.

An oaken bed with a faded green damask coverlet, and hangings of the same material looped up above it; an oaken table with twisted legs; a huge stone chimney-piece of the time of Louis XIII., to which in winter a fire might impart some appearance of comfort, but which now, wanting that, wanting all ornaments and utensils, wanting wood, and stuffed with old newspapers, only made the place look still more dreary. Such was the apartment of which Balsamo was for one night to be the fortunate possessor.

We must add that there were two chairs and a wardrobe painted of a grey colour.

Whilst La Brie was endeavouring to give a habitable appearance to the room, which Nicole had aired before retiring to her own appartment, Balsamo had wakened Althotas and returned to the house. When he reached Andrée's door, he stopped to listen. From the moment Andrée left the dining-room, she felt that she had escaped from the mysterious influence which the stranger exercised over her, and to rouse herself completely from its power, she continued to play on her harpsichord. Its sound reached Balsamo through the closed door, and, as we have said, he stopped to listen.

After a minute or two he made several gestures with a sweeping circular motion which might have been mistaken for a species of conjuration, since Andrée, struck again by the same sensation she had previously experienced, ceased to play, let her arms fall immovable by her side, and turned towards the door with a slow stiff motion, as if she were obeying a command against her own free will. Balsamo smiled in the dark as if he saw through the door. No doubt this was all he wanted, for he stretched out his left hand, and, having found the balustrade of the staircase, which was steep and broad, he ascended to the red room. In proportion as he increased his distance, Andrée, with the same slow rigid motion, returned to her harpsichord, and when Balsamo reached the highest stair, he heard her resume the first notes of the air which he had interrupted.

Having entered his chamber, he dismissed La Brie. La Brie was evidently a good servant, accustomed to obey on the instant; but now, after moving a few steps towards the door, he stopped.

"Well?" said Balsamo.

La Brie slipped his hand into his waistcoat pocket, and seemed feeling for something in its silent depths, but he did not reply.

"Have you anything to say to me, my friend?" inquired Balsamo, approaching him.

La Brie made a great effort over himself, and pulled his hand out of his pocket.

"I merely wished to say, sir, that you made a mistake this evening."

"Did I?" said Balsamo. "How so?"

"You meant to give me a crown, and you gave me a louis-d'or;" and he opened his hand and disclosed to view the new shining piece.

Balsamo looked at the old servant with an expression of admiration which indicated he had not the highest opinion of men as far as probity was concerned.

"'*And honest?*" said he, "as Hamlet says;" and, feeling in his own pocket, he drew out a second louis-d'or, which he laid beside the first in La Brie's hand.

La Brie's joy at this munificence could not be described. For twenty years he had not once seen gold, and in order to convince him that he was really the happy possessor of such a treasure, Balsamo had to put

the money with his own hand into La Brie's pocket. He bowed to the ground, and was retiring without turning his back on the stranger, when the latter stopped him.

"At what hour does the family usually rise in the morning?" asked he.

"Monsieur de Taverney rises late, but Mademoiselle de Taverney is always up at a very early hour."

"At what hour?"

"About six o'clock."

"Who sleeps above this room?"

"I do, sir."

"And below?"

"No one; the vestibule is under this."

"Thank you, my friend; now you may go."

"Good-night, sir."

"Good-night; but, by-the-bye, see that my carriage be all safe."

"You may depend on me, sir."

"If you hear any noise, or see any light, do not be alarmed; I have an old lame servant in it who travels with me everywhere. Tell M. Gilbert not to interfere with him; and tell him also, if you please, not to go out to-morrow morning until I have spoken to him. Can you remember all this?"

"Oh, certainly! But are you going to leave us so soon, sir?"

"I am not quite sure," said Balsamo, with a smile; "yet, strictly speaking, I ought to be at Bar-le-Duc to-morrow evening."

La Brie sighed resignedly, gave a last glance at the bed, and, taking up the candle, went towards the fireplace to give a little warmth to the great damp room by setting fire to the papers, as he had no wood.

"No, never mind," said Balsamo, preventing him; "leave the old papers; if I do not sleep, I can amuse myself by reading them."

La Brie bowed and retired.

Balsamo listened until the steps of the old servant had died away on the stairs, and until he heard them overhead. Then he went to the window. In the opposite tower there was a light in the window of a garret, the curtains of which were but half closed. It was Legay's room. She was thoughtfully unfastening her gown and handkerchief, and from time to time she opened her window and leaned out to see into the court-yard. Balsamo looked at her with more attention than he had chosen to bestow on her during supper. "What a singular resemblance!" he murmured to himself. At this moment the light in the garret was extinguished, although its occupant was not yet in bed.

Balsamo leaned against the wall, listening anxiously. The notes of the harpsichord still sounded in his ears. He assured himself that its harmony alone awoke the midnight silence around; then, opening the door, which La Brie had shut, he cautiously descended the stairs, and gently pushed open the door of the saloon.

Andrée heard nothing; her white hands continued to wander over the old yellow keys of the instrument. Opposite her was a mirror set in an old carved frame, the gilding of which had changed to a dull grey. The air she played was melancholy, or rather, she played merely harmonies instead of an air. No doubt it was all extempore; and she was thus reproducing in music her early recollections, or indulging in the dreams of her imagination. Perhaps her spirit, saddened by her residence at Taverney, had left the château to wander in the large shady gardens of the convent of the Annonciades at Nancy, ringing with the merry voices of troops of

happy boarders. Whether such were her dreams or not, her vague gaze seemed to lose itself in the sombre mirror before her, which reflected only indistinctly the different objects in the vast apartment, dimly lighted by the single candle placed on the harpsichord.

Sometimes she suddenly ceased. It was when she recalled the strange vision of the evening, and her unaccountable impressions ; but before her thoughts had time to take any precise form, her heart beat, she felt a thrill run through her limbs, and she started as though a living being had come into contact with her. All at once, as she tried to account for these feelings, they returned. She felt a thrill as if from an electric shock. Her eye became fixed, her floating thoughts became embodied as it were, and she perceived something move over the dim mirror.

The door of the saloon had opened noiselessly, and in the doorway a shadow appeared. She shuddered, her fingers wandered involuntarily over the keys ; yet nothing could be more easily accounted for than the appearance of the figure. Might it not be her father, or Nicole, or La Brie, who, before retiring, had returned to the apartment upon some household errand? La Brie's visits of that kind were frequent ; and on these occasions the faithful creature never made a sound. But no ; the eyes of her soul showed her that the being whom she did not see was none of those we have named.

The shadow drew nearer, becoming more distinct in the mirror, and when within the circle of the light afforded by the candle the stranger was seen, his dress of black velvet increasing the ghastly pallor of his face ; he had, for some mysterious reason, laid aside the silk one which he wore at supper.*

She would have turned and screamed, but Balsamo extended his arms, and she remained motionless. She made another effort : "Sir," said she, "in the name of Heaven, what do you want?"

He smiled, the glass reflected his smile, and she watched it with eager gaze, but he did not reply.

She tried once more to rise, but could not ; an irresistible power, a paralyzing feeling, which was not without a pleasurable sensation attending it, fixed her to her chair, whilst her eye never left the magic mirror. This new sensation alarmed her, for she felt that she was altogether in the power of the unknown. She made another almost supernatural effort to call for aid, but Balsamo extended both his hands above her head, and no sound escaped her lips. She continued dumb, her bosom loaded with a stupefying heat which ascended slowly in invading billows to her brain. She had no longer strength or will ; her head sank on her shoulder.

At this moment Balsamo thought he heard a slight noise ; he turned—the face of the man he had seen before was at the window. He frowned, and, strange to say, the frown was reflected on the young girl's face.

Then, turning again to Andrée, he drew down his hands, which he had hitherto held above her head ; then he raised them again gently, again drew them down, and continued thus to overwhelm her with column upon column of the electric fluid.

"Sleep!" said he.

She still struggled against his power.

"Sleep!" he repeated, in a voice of command, "sleep ! it is my will !"

Then all her faculties yielded to that all-powerful will ; she leaned her elbow on the harpsichord, drooped her head on her hand, and slept.

* It is well known that silk is a bad conductor, and repels the electric fluid. It is almost impossible to magnetise a person who wears a dress of silk.

Balsamo now, without turning his face from her, left the room, closed the door, and went up to his own chamber. Scarcely had he retired when the face once more appeared at the window. It was Gilbert's.

CHAPTER VIII.

ATTRACTION.

GILBERT, whose menial position in the château of Taverney caused him to be excluded from the saloon, watched all the evening those whose rank permitted them that privilege. During supper he saw Balsamo's looks and gestures. He remarked Andrée's attention to him, the baron's unusual affability, and the respectful eagerness of La Brie.

When the party rose from table, he hid in a clump of shrubs, lest Nicole, in closing the shutters, or in going to her own room, might see him, and put an end to his espionage. Nicole had, indeed, made her round to secure all for the night, but one of the shutters of the saloon she was forced to leave open, the half unfixed hinge of which would not permit it to close. Gilbert knew that such was the case, so he remained out, certain that he could continue his watchings when Legay was gone.

His watchings, have we said? What reason had Gilbert to watch? Having been brought up at Taverney, did he not know it perfectly, as well as the habits of the family? The reason was, that on that evening he had other motives than those which usually actuated him; he not only watched, but waited.

When Nicole quitted the saloon, leaving Andrée there, after having slowly closed the doors and shutters, she walked for a few minutes up and down in front of the house, as if she expected some one. Then she looked furtively on all sides, peeped into the saloon, waited a little longer, and at length made up her mind to go to bed.

Gilbert, motionless, bending down close to the trunk of a tree, and scarcely venturing to breathe, saw every movement and gesture of Nicole; and when she had disappeared, and when he saw a light in the windows of her apartment, he stole again on tip-toe to the window, leant forward, and continued, although scarcely knowing why, with eager eyes to devour Andrée, who was sitting at her harpsichord in a listless attitude.

Just then Joseph Balsamo entered the saloon. Gilbert started, and every faculty was strained to enable him to comprehend the scene which we have just described. He thought that Balsamo complimented Andrée on her musical talent, that she replied with her usual coldness; that, with a smile, he repeated his praise, and that then she stopped to reply, and to dismiss him for the night. He admired the grace with which the stranger retired backwards; but he had in reality understood nothing of the scene, as it had all passed in silence. He had heard no words, he had seen the lips and hands of the pair before him move, and close observer as he was, he discovered no mystery in what appeared to pass so naturally.

Balsamo gone, Gilbert remained no longer in an attitude of observation, but apparently lost in observation of Andrée, so beautiful in her careless attitude; but soon, to his amazement, he discovered that she was asleep. He remained for some moments longer in the same position, to be certain that such was the case; then, when he was quite convinced, he clasped his forehead with both hands, like one who feared for his senses in the

flood of thoughts and sensations which poured on his brain. "Oh!" said he wildly, "her hand!—that my lips might only touch her hand! Gilbert, Gilbert, rouse thee! I WILL do it!"

As he spoke, he rushed into the anteroom and reached the door of the saloon, which, as when Balsamo entered, opened without noise. But scarcely was it open, scarcely did he find the young girl before him without anything separating them, than he felt all the importance of the step he had taken. He, the son of a farmer and a peasant woman—he, the timid young man, who in his lowness dared hardly raise his eyes to his haughty mistress—he was going to press to his lips the hem of the robe or the tip of the finger of this sleeping majesty, who, if she awoke, would with a look crush him to the dust. At this idea, all that had intoxicated him and made him bold vanished; he stopped and clung to the door-post, for he trembled and felt as if he should fall.

But Andrée's meditation or sleep (for Gilbert could not yet decide whether she slept or was only buried in thought) was so deep that he in no way disturbed her; yet one might have heard the beating of his heart, which he tried in vain to still. He remained a minute gazing on her. She stirred not; she was so beautiful, with her head gently bent forward on her hand, her long unpowdered hair falling on her shoulders, that the flame, which fear for a moment had extinguished, rekindled. His madness returned—he must at least touch something touched by her. He made a step towards her; the floor creaked under his unsteady footstep, a cold moisture stood on his forehead. But she seemed to have heard nothing.

"She sleeps!" he murmured; "oh joy! she sleeps!"

But before he advanced three steps farther he stopped again. It was the unusual brightness of the candle which alarmed him now, for it had burnt down in the socket, and gave, as is usual, a larger flame just before it expired. But not a sound, not a breath in the house. La Brie had retired to bed, and no doubt to sleep, and the light in Nicole's chamber was extinguished.

"Courage!" said he, and he advanced anew. Strange, the floor creaked again; but Andrée stirred not, and Gilbert himself could scarcely avoid being frightened by this mysterious repose.

"She sleeps!" repeated he again, with that varying resolution peculiar to the lover and the coward—and he who is not master of his heart is always a coward; "she sleeps! Oh, heaven! oh, heaven!"

In the midst of all these feverish altercations of fear and hope, he still advanced, and at last found himself within two paces of Andrée. Then he felt as if fascinated. He would have fled, were flight possible; but once within the circle of attraction, of which she was the centre, he felt himself rooted to the spot, and, conquered, subdued, he fell on both his knees.

Andrée remained motionless as a statue. Gilbert took the hem of her dress in both hands, and kissed it; then he looked up slowly, breathlessly—his eyes met hers, which were wide open, yet she saw him not.

Gilbert no longer knew what to think; he was overwhelmed with astonishment. For a moment the horrible idea that she was dead flashed across his mind: he seized her hand—it was warm, and the pulse beat softly; but this hand remained unresistingly in his. Then, bewildered by having touched it, he imagined that she saw, that she felt, that she had discovered his maddening passion—poor blinded heart!—that she expected his visit, that her silence indicated consent, her immovability favour. He raised her hand to his lips, and imprinted on it a long and

"Because I see that though you would not wrong me, you would another, perhaps."

"Possibly," he muttered; "but look not at that!" he added in an authoritative tone.

Her face resumed its usual expression.

"Are all asleep in the house?"

"I do not know."

"Then look and see."

"Where shall I look?"

"Let me see—first, in your father's room; what is he doing?"

"He is in bed."

"Asleep?"

"No; he is reading."

"What is he reading?"

"One of those bad books which he wishes me to read."

"And you will not read them?"

"No!" said she, with an expression of the greatest scorn on her features.

"Well, we are safe, then—look in Nicole's room."

"There is no light in her room."

"But you do not want light to see."

"Not if you command me."

"See! it is my will."

"Ah, I see!"

"What?"

"She is half undressed—she is opening her door softly—she is going downstairs!"

"So—where is she going?"

"She stops at the courtyard gate—she waits behind it—she watches!"

Balsamo smiled. "Is she watching to see whether you are out?"

"No."

"Well, that is the principal matter; for when a young lady is free from her father's and her waiting-maid's eye, she has nothing to fear unless—"

"No."

"You are replying to my thought."

"I see it."

"Then you have no lover?"

"I?" asked she, disdainfully.

"Yes; you might be in love—young people do not leave their convents to be shut up. They give liberty to their hearts when their persons are set free!"

Andrée shook her head. "My heart is free," she said, sadly; and such an expression of candour and virgin modesty lighted her features, that Balsamo exclaimed with rapture, "A lily!—a true pupil!—a clairvoyante!"—and he clasped his hands with joy and gratitude.

Then turning again to Andrée: "But if you do not love, you may be loved," said he.

"I do not know," replied she, softly.

"What! you do not know!" he cried, imperiously. "When I question, I expect a proper answer!" and he touched her bosom again with the steel rod. She started, but without evincing so much pain as before.

"Yes, I see," said she, "but be gentle, or you will kill me."

"What do you see?"

"Oh—but no! It cannot be," said she.

"What, then, do you see!"

"A young man, who, ever since my leaving the convent, has followed me, watched me, brooded on me, yet always secretly."

"Who is the young man?"

"I do not see his face. I see his coat—it is like that of a workman."

"Where is he?"

"At the foot of the stairs. He seems in sorrow—he weeps."

"Why can you not see his face?"

"It is hidden in his hands."

"Look through his hands."

She made an effort; then exclaimed, "No—it is impossible—Gilbert?"

"Why impossible?"

"He?—he dare not love me!" cried she, with a lofty expression of disdain.

Balsamo smiled like one who knows mankind, and who is aware that there is no distance the heart will not overleap, were there an abyss between it and its object.

"And what is he doing at the foot of the staircase?"

"Stay: he removes his hands from his face—he seizes the balustrade—he rises—he ascends."

"Ascends where?"

"Up here—but no matter—he dares not come in."

"Why not?"

"Because he is afraid," said she, with a smile of contempt.

"But he will listen?"

"Yes; for he is now putting his ear to the door."

"That annoys you?"

"Yes, he may hear what I say."

"And would he use it against her whom he loves?"

"Yes, in a moment of passion or jealousy—in such a moment he would be capable of anything."

"Then let us get rid of him," said Balsamo, and he walked noisily to the door.

Gilbert's hour to be courageous was not yet come, for, at the noise, fearing to be caught, he jumped astride on the balustrade, and slid down noiselessly to the bottom of the staircase. Andrée uttered a stifled cry.

"Look no more in that direction," said Balsamo, returning towards her; "the loves of the vulgar are of no importance. Speak to me of the Baron of Taverney, will you?"

"I will answer what you choose," said she, sighing.

"The baron is very poor, is he not?"

"Very poor."

"Too poor to allow you any amusement?"

"Oh, yes."

"You are heartily tired of Taverney?"

"Heartily!"

"You are ambitious, perhaps?"

"No."

"You love your father?"

"Yes," said the young girl with hesitation.

"Yet I thought this evening your filial love was not very apparent," said Balsamo, smiling.

"I am vexed at him for having wasted my mother's fortune, so that poor Maison Rouge has to pass his time in garrison, and cannot worthily support the dignity of our family."

"Who is this Maison Rouge?"

"My brother Philip."

"Why do you call him Maison Rouge?"

"It is, or rather it was, the name of one of our castles, and the eldest of the family bears it until the death of the chief—then he is called Taverney."

"You love your brother, then?"

"Oh, dearly, dearly!"

"More than any one in the world?"

"More than any one in the world!"

"Why do you love him so warmly, and your father so coldly?"

"Because he has a noble heart: he would die for me."

"And your father?"

She was silent. Doubtless Balsamo thought it better not to force her against her will on this point; and perhaps, also, he already knew as much of the baron as he wished.

"And where is the Chevalier Maison Rouge at this moment?"

"Where is Philip?"

"Yes!"

"In the garrison at Strasbourg."

"Do you see him there?"

"Where?"

"At Strasbourg."

"I do not see him."

"Do you know that town?"

"No."

"I know it—let us visit it together—will you?"

"Yes; with pleasure!"

"Now. Is he at the theatre?"

"No."

"Is he at the coffee-house in the square with the other officers?"

"No."

"Has he gone back to his apartment? I wish that you should look for him there."

"I see nothing. I think he is not in Strasbourg."

"Do you know the road from thence?"

"No."

"I know it—follow me! Is he at Saverne?"

"No."

"Is he at Saarbrück?"

"No."

"Is he at Nancy?"

"Stay!—stay!" The young girl seemed collecting all her powers—her heart beat—her bosom heaved. "I see him!—I see him!—dear Philip—what joy!"

"What is he doing?"

"Dear Philip!" continued Andrée, her eyes sparkling with joy.

"Where is he?"

"On horseback, riding through a town I know well."

"What town?"

"Nancy! Nancy! where I was at the convent."

"Are you sure that it is he?"

"Oh, yes, the torches around show his face."

"Torches?" said Balsamo, with surprise; "why, are there torches?"

"He is on horseback, at the door of a magnificent carriage, richly gilt."

"Ah!" cried Balsamo, who appeared to comprehend this, "who is in the carriage?"

"A young lady—oh, how majestic she is! how graceful! how beautiful! Strange, I almost fancy I have seen her before; no—it is Nicole's features which resemble hers."

"Nicole resembles the young lady who is so beautiful and so majestic?"

"Yes, yes; but as a jasmine may be said to resemble a lily."

"Let us see what is passing at Nancy at this moment."

"The young lady bends forward, and makes a sign to Philip to approach; he obeys, and takes off his hat respectfully."

"Can you hear what they say?"

"I am listening," said Andrée, impressing silence on Balsamo by a gesture. "I hear, I hear!" murmured she.

"What does the young lady say?"

"She orders him, with a sweet smile, to hasten the pace of the horses. She says she will require her escort to be ready at six in the morning, as she wishes to stop on the road."

"To stop? Where?"

"My brother is just asking her. Heavens! she wishes to stop at Taverney, to see my father! Such a great princess at our poor house! What shall we do—without plate—almost without linen?"

"Do not be uneasy; that will be provided for."

"Oh, thanks, thanks!" And the young girl, who had half risen from her seat, sank back with a heavy sigh, completely exhausted.

Balsamo immediately approached her, and, by some magnetic passes in an opposite direction, changed the course of the electric fluid. A calm sleep then stole over her lovely frame, which had bent down exhausted, her head sinking on her palpitating bosom.

"Recover thy strength," said Balsamo, gazing at her with a stern delight; "I shall soon require thy light again. O Science!" continued he, with the rapture of exalted faith, "thou alone never deceivest us; to thee, then, man ought to sacrifice every feeling. This young girl is beautiful, pure as an angel; and He who made beauty and innocence knows how dear they ought to be to us. But let the creature perish—how pure, how perfect, how beautiful soever she be—if I can but make her speak the words of truth! Let all the delights of the world—love, passion, rapture—exist no longer for me, if I can only with a firm step advance on the path of light and science. And now, young girl, now that my will has given thee strength, awake!—or rather, sink again in the sleep which reveals all things! Speak again; but now it is for me that thou must speak."

He spread his hands over her head, and forced her to sit up by breathing upon her. Seeing her ready and submissive, he took from his pocket-book a curl of jet-black hair, which he put into Andrée's hand.

"See!" he commanded.

"Again!" said she, with anguish. "Oh, no, let me rest—it is too painful; and just now I felt so happy!"

"See!" replied Balsamo, pitilessly, touching her again with the steel rod.

She wrung her hands, struggling to evade the tyranny of the experimenter. The foam was on her lips, as formerly it gathered on those of the pythoness on her sacred tripod.

"I see, I see!" cried she, with the despair of a subdued will.

"What do you see?"

"A woman."

"Ah!" exclaimed Balsamo, with wild joy, "science is not, then, a useless word, like virtue! Mesmer is greater than Brutus! Describe the woman, that I may know you really see her whom I would have you see."

"She is a brunette, tall, with blue eyes, jet-black hair, and sinewy arms."

"What is she doing?"

"She gallops, she flies forward, carried by a splendid horse, reeking with sweat and foam."

"In what direction?"

"There, there!" said the young girl, pointing to the west.

"On the highway?"

"Yes."

"Towards Chalons?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Balsamo; "she takes the road which I shall take—she goes to Paris, as I do; I shall find her there. Now rest," said he; and he took from Andrée's hand the curl of hair.

Her arms fell powerless by her side.

"Now return to your harpsichord!"

Andrée arose, and made a step towards the door, but, overcome by inexpressible fatigue, her limbs refused to support her. She staggered.

"Renew your strength and walk!" said Balsamo, enveloping her anew with magnetic passes; and she, like the generous steed that braces every nerve to fulfil his master's will, unjust though it be, walked erect. Balsamo opened the door, and, still sleeping, she descended the stairs.

CHAPTER XI.

NICOLE LEGAY.

WHILST the scene of interrogation was passing in Balsamo's chamber, Gilbert remained under the railings at the foot of the staircase in a state of indescribable torture. Not daring to ascend again to listen at the door of the red chamber, he fell into despair, and this despair was increased tenfold by the feeling of his weakness and his inferiority.

Balsamo was only a man (for Gilbert, being a profound thinker, a philosopher in embryo, had small faith in sorcerers); but then this man was strong, and he was weak—this man was courageous, and Gilbert was not so yet. Twenty times he arose, determined to beard the stranger, and twenty times his trembling limbs bent under him, and he sank on his knees. Then the thought struck him that he would get a ladder used by La Brie (who was at the same time cook, butler, and gardener) for nailing the jessamine and honeysuckle against the walls, and, by propping it against the balcony of the apartment, be enabled to mount to the window, and witness what he so ardently desired to discover.

He passed stealthily into the courtyard, ran to the spot where the ladder lay, but, as he was stooping to take it up, he thought he heard a noise in the direction of the house, and he turned. He was almost certain that in the obscurity he saw a human form enter the dark frame of the open door, but moving so quickly and so noiselessly that it appeared rather a spectre than a living being. He let the ladder fall, and, his heart beating audibly, hastened back towards the château.

Some minds are constitutionally superstitious, and these are generally the most exalted and the richest in fancy. They admit the fabulous more readily than the rational, because what is natural is too common for them,

impelled as they are towards the impossible, or at least the ideal. Such spirits delight in the darkness of the forest, the depths of which they people with phantoms or genii. The ancients, who were poets in all things, saw these fantastic beings in open day; but as their sun, warmer and brighter than ours, forbade the fancy to bring forth spectres and demons, they filled the forest with smiling dryads and wood-nymphs. Gilbert, born in a gloomier clime, imagined he saw a spirit. This time, in spite of his incredulity, he recalled the words of the woman who had fled from Balsamo, and the idea flashed across his mind that the sorcerer might have summoned up some evil spirit to do his bad behests. But Gilbert had always, after a first impression, a second not more encouraging, for it was the result of reflection. He recalled all the arguments of powerful minds against the belief in the return of spirits to this world, and thinking of the article *Spectre* in the *Philosophical Dictionary* restored his courage; but it was only to give him another apprehension, better founded and more alarming.

If he had indeed seen any one, it must have been a real individual deeply interested in watching him. Fear suggested M. de Taverney; his conscience whispered another name. He looked up to Nicole's apartment: her candle was out, not a ray of light was visible; not a whisper, not a movement, not a light in all the house, except in the stranger's room. He looked, he listened; then, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, he took up the ladder again, convinced that he had been deceived, and that this vision had been the result of a suspension of his observing faculties, rather than of their exercise.

Just as he was about to place his ladder, Balsamo's door opened and then shut. At this sound he hurried in, and saw Andrée glide out and descend the stairs without noise and without a light, as if guided and supported by a supernatural power. Having reached the landing-place, she passed by where he had now concealed himself in the shade, her dress touching him as she passed, and continued her way. The baron was asleep, La Brie in bed, Nicole in the other turret, Balsamo's door closed: he could not be surprised by any one. He made a violent effort and followed her, adapting his step to hers, and keeping at a distance from her. She passed through the anteroom into the saloon; but, although she left the door open, he stopped just before he reached it. Should he enter? He hesitated, then resolved; but, just as his foot was on the threshold, an arm was stretched out in the darkness, and he was firmly grasped. Gilbert turned, his heart panting as if it would burst his bosom.

"So I have caught you at last!" whispered an angry voice close at his ear. "Deny now, if you can, that you have meetings—that you are in love with her!"

Gilbert had not strength to shake himself loose from the gripe which detained him, yet it was only that of a young girl—it was simply the hand of Nicole Legay that held him.

"What do you mean?" whispered he, impatiently.

"Oh, I am to speak it out, then?" and Nicole raised her voice nearly to the loudest pitch.

"No; for God's sake be quiet!" replied Gilbert, between his closed teeth, and dragging her away from the door.

"Well, come with me, then!"

This was what Gilbert wanted, for, by going away with her, he took her away from Andrée. He followed Nicole, who led the way into the courtyard, shutting the door behind her when he had passed.

"But," said Gilbert, "mademoiselle will be retiring to her apartment; she will call you to help her to undress, and you will not be in the house."

"Do you think I care for that now? Let her call or not, I must speak to you."

"You might put off until to-morrow what you have got to say, Nicole. You know Mademoiselle Andrée is strict."

"Yes, I would advise her to be strict—particularly with me!"

"To-morrow, Nicole, I promise."

"You promise! I know what your fine promises are. This very day you promised to meet me near Maison Rouge. Where were you? Why, in the very opposite direction, since you brought the traveller hither! Your promises indeed! I believe them just as I did those of our confessor at the Annonciades, who swore to keep secret what we confessed, and then told all our sins to the abbess!"

"But, Nicole, you will be dismissed if you are seen."

"And you—will you not be dismissed for being in love with my young lady? Do you think the baron too generous for that?"

"He could surely have no motive for dismissing me," said Gilbert, endeavouring to defend himself.

"Oh, none in the world! The baron, perhaps, allows you to pay your addresses to his daughter. I really did not know he was quite so great a philosopher!"

Gilbert might easily have proved to Nicole, by relating what he had just witnessed, that, if he was to blame, at least Andrée was not privy to his misconduct; and, incredible as her visit to the stranger's apartment would have appeared, Nicole, thanks to the good opinion women have of one another, would have believed him. But deeper reflection arrested the words on his lips. Andrée's secret was one that might serve him, as it placed her completely in his power; and as he loved Andrée infinitely more than he feared Nicole, he was silent on the singular events he had just witnessed.

"Well," said he, "since you insist on having an explanation, let us understand each other."

"Oh, that is easily done. But you are right—this is a bad place for it; let us go to my room."

"To your room? Impossible!"

"Why so?"

"We might be surprised."

"Indeed! and who would surprise us? Mademoiselle? True; she might be jealous about her sweet youth! Unfortunately for her, since her secret is discovered, I am not afraid of her. Mademoiselle Andrée jealous of Nicole! What an honour!" And the forced laugh of the young girl frightened Gilbert more than any invective or menace could possibly have done.

"It is not mademoiselle of whom I am afraid," said he; "I am only anxious on your own account, Nicole."

"Oh, most anxious, no doubt! But you are going to my room for no bad purpose; and you have often told me, where there is no bad intention there should be no shame. Philosophers are Jesuits sometimes; and our confessor at the Annonciades told me all that before you. Come, come, no more false reasons! Come to my room; I am resolved you sha'l!"

"Nicole!" said he, grinding his teeth.

"Well! what more, pray?"

"Take care!" and he raised his hand.

"Oh, I am not afraid! You struck me once; but you were jealous then. At that time you loved me, and I allowed you to strike me. But I shall not now—no, no, no! for you no longer love me, and it is I who am jealous now."

"But what will you do?" cried Gilbert, grasping her wrist.

"I shall scream, and mademoiselle will hear me. I advise you to let go your hold of me."

Gilbert dropped her hand; then, seizing the ladder, and dragging it cautiously after him, he placed it against the wall of the turret, so that it reached nearly to Nicole's window.

"See how things turn in this world," said she maliciously: "the ladder which was to assist you to climb to mademoiselle's apartment must merely serve you to descend from my humble attic. Very flattering for me, is it not?"

Nicole, perceiving the advantage she had gained, declared her triumph with that precipitate eagerness which women, unless, indeed, of very superior minds, often exhibit—a victory which is often too dearly purchased.

Gilbert, who felt himself in a false position, was silent, and followed the young girl, reserving all his powers for the approaching contest.

In the first place, however, like a prudent general, he satisfied himself on two points. The first was, in passing before the window, that Mademoiselle de Taverney was still in the saloon; and the second, on reaching Nicole's chamber, that, in case of necessity, he could reach the ladder without much risk of breaking his neck, and thus allow himself to slide to the ground.

Nicole's room was as simple in its furniture as the rest of the house. It was a loft, the walls of which were covered with a drab and green paper. A wooden bed, and a large geranium placed near the window, were its whole furniture and decorations, except a large bonnet-box, given her by Andrée, which served both for table and wardrobe. Nicole sat down on the edge of the bed, Gilbert on a corner of the box. She had had time to calm down while ascending the stairs, and now, completely mistress of herself, she felt strong in having justice on her side. Gilbert, on the contrary, was agitated, and could not recover his coolness; his anger had increased as hers decreased.

"So," said she, "you are in love with mademoiselle, and you have attempted to deceive me?"

"Who told you I was in love with mademoiselle?"

"Dame! were you not going to a rendezvous with her?"

"How do you know that I had a rendezvous with her?"

"How do I know? Why, there was no one else to go to but the sorcerer!"

"Well, I might have been going to him; I am ambitious."

"Say envious."

"It is the same word taken in a bad sense."

"Don't let us dispute about words—you love me no longer."

"Yes, I do—I love you still."

"Then why do you avoid me?"

"Because you quarrel with me whenever I meet you."

"That is because you always avoid me."

"You know I am shy—that I love solitude."

"Yes; and you seek solitude ladder in hand!"

Gilbert was beaten on his first move.

"Come, come!—Be frank if you can, Gilbert, and confess that you no longer love me, or that you love two women at once."

"Well, and if I did, what would you say?"

"I should say it was monstrous!"

"No, no! that there was an error somewhere."

"In your heart?"

"No—in our social state. You know there are nations where every man is allowed seven or eight wives."

"They are not Christians," said Nicole, pettishly.

"They are philosophers," said Gilbert, with dignity.

"So, Master Philosopher, you would wish me to take a second lover, as you have done!"

"I would not be unjust and tyrannical; I should not wish to repress the impulses of your heart. Freedom, blessed freedom, respects free-will. If you change your love, Nicole, I shall not force you to a fidelity which, in my opinion, is unnatural."

"Ah, I see plainly you no longer love me!"

Gilbert was great in argument—not that he was skilful in logic, but he was an adept in paradox, and, however little he knew, he still knew more than Nicole. She had read only what amused her—he what taught him a little also—and, as they talked, he regained his presence of mind while Nicole began to lose hers.

"Has the great philosopher any memory?" asked Nicole with an ironical smile.

"Sometimes," replied Gilbert.

"Then you have not forgotten, perhaps, what you said to me five months ago when I came with mademoiselle from the Annonciades?"

"I have forgotten—tell it me."

"You said, 'I am poor;' it was the day we were reading among the old ruins."

"Well, go on."

"You trembled very much that day——"

"Very likely—I am naturally timid; but I do all I can to correct that fault, and some others also."

"So that when you have corrected all your faults," said Nicole, laughing, "you will be perfect."

"I shall be strong—wisdom gives strength."

"Where did you read that, pray?"

"Never mind—return to what you were saying."

Nicole felt that she was losing ground every minute.

"Well, you said to me, 'I am poor—no one loves me; yet there is something here,' and you pressed your hand on your heart."

"No, Nicole: if I pressed my hand anywhere when I said that, it must have been on my forehead. The heart is merely a forcing-pump, which drives the blood to the extremities of the body—read the article *Heart* in the *Philosophical Dictionary*," and Gilbert drew himself up proudly. Humble before Balsamo, he gave himself the airs of a prince before Nicole.

"You are right, Gilbert; it must have been your head which you struck. Well, striking your forehead, you said, 'I am treated here worse than a dog; indeed, Mahon is in a happier condition than I.' I replied that they were wrong not to love you; that if you had been my brother I should have loved you also. I think, however, I said that from my heart, not from my head; but perhaps I am wrong, for I never read the *Philosophical Dictionary*."

"You ought to read it, Nicole."

"Then you threw your arms round me. You said, 'you are an orphan—I am one, too; let us love one another as if we were brother and sister—no! better than if we were; for if we were, we should be forbidden to love as I wish we should;' then you kissed me."

"Very possibly!"

"Did you think then as you spoke?"

"Oh, yes—one generally thinks what one says at the time one says it."

"So that now——?"

"Now I am five months older than I was. I have learned things of which I knew nothing then, and I look forward to things which I do not yet know; I think differently now."

"You are a deceiver, a hypocrite, a liar!" exclaimed she, furiously.

"No more than a traveller, should he make two different answers to the same question—if you asked him in a valley what he thought of the prospect, and again when he had got to the top of a mountain which before had closed his view."

"So, then, you will not marry me?"

"I never said I would marry you," said Gilbert, contemptuously.

"And yet," cried the exasperated girl, "I think Nicole Legay fully the equal of Sebastian Gilbert."

"All human beings are equal; but nature or education makes certain faculties greater in one man than another, and according as these faculties are more or less developed, men differ from one another."

"So that your faculties being more developed than mine, you are raised above me?"

"Quite correct!—you do not reason yet, Nicole, but you understand."

"Yes, yes! I understand!" cried Nicole, with redoubled passion.

"What do you understand?"

"That you are a bad man."

"It is possible. Many are born with bad inclinations. Rousseau himself had such, but he corrected them—I shall do the same."

"Oh, heavens!" cried Nicole, "how could I ever love such a man?"

"You did not love me, Nicole," replied Gilbert, coldly; "I pleased you—that was all. You had just come from Nancy, where you had only seen students whom you laughed at, or soldiers who frightened you; so you took a fancy to me, and for a month or two we enjoyed our dream of love. But should we therefore be tied together to be eternally miserable? You see, Nicole, if we bound ourselves for our lives in a moment of happiness, we should give up our free-will, and that would be absurd!"

"Is that philosophy?" asked Nicole.

"I think so," replied Gilbert.

"Then there is nothing sacred in the eyes of philosophers?"

"Oh, yes!—reason is."

"Yet I think you once said something about being faithful to the choice of the heart. You recollect your theory on marriages——?"

"On unions, Nicole, for I shall never marry."

"You will never marry?"

"No! I shall be a learned man—a philosopher. Science requires perfect freedom of the mind, and philosophy that of the body."

"Monsieur Gilbert," said she, "you are a wretch; and whatever I am, I am at least better than you."

"Now," said Gilbert, rising, "we are only losing time—you in abusing me, I in listening to you—let us end! You loved me because you took pleasure in loving."

"Well?"

"Well!—there is no reason in the world that I should make myself unhappy, because you did a thing which gave you gratification."

"Fool!" she exclaimed, "you think you can confound my common sense—and you pretend not to fear me!"

"Fear you! Why, Nicole, jealousy is turning your brain!"

"Jealous!" she cried, stamping her foot, "and why should I be jealous! Is there a prettier girl in the province than I?—if I had but as white hands as mademoiselle—and I shall have some day, when I do no more hard work. You are my first lover, it is true, but you are not the first man who has paid court to me. Gilbert, Gilbert! do not force me to seek revenge on you—do not make me leave the narrow path in which a last remembrance of my mother and the regular repetition of my prayers have kept me. Gilbert, if you do, you may have to reproach yourself with bringing many evils on yourself and others."

"All in good time," said Gilbert. "So now that you have got to the summit of your dignity, Nicole, I am perfectly satisfied on one point."

"And what may that be?" inquired the girl.

"Simply that if I consented now to marry you——"

"What then?"

"Why, that you would refuse me."

Nicole paused, her clenched hands and gnashing teeth showing the workings of her mind.

"You are right," she exclaimed at length. "Yes: I also begin to ascend that mountain of which you spoke. I see a wider prospect before me. The wife of a learned man, a philosopher! No, I am destined for something greater than that! Mount your ladder! and don't break your neck—though I begin to think it would be a blessing for many persons if you would—perhaps even a blessing for yourself."

She turned her back on him. Gilbert stood a moment wavering and irresolute; for Nicole, excited by anger and jealousy, was truly beautiful. But he had resolved to break with her—Nicole could blast at once his love and his ambition. His decision was made.

In a few seconds, Nicole, hearing no sound, looked behind her. She was alone in the apartment.

"Gone!" she murmured; "and mademoiselle—oh, I shall know to-morrow whether she loves him or not!"

She went to the window and looked out: all was dark, every light extinguished. She stole on tiptoe to her young lady's door and listened.

"She is in bed—she sleeps soundly," said she, "but to-morrow I shall know all!"

CHAPTER XI.

WAITING-MAID AND MISTRESS.

THE calmness with which Nicole returned to her room was not affected. Young, strong, full of an uncultivated self-confidence, she was blessed with that faculty so important for those who would govern where they love—the faculty of forgetting; and she could sleep after she had arranged with the little malicious sprites that dwelt in her heart her plan of vengeance.

Mademoiselle de Taverney appeared to her even more guilty than Gilbert. This aristocratic girl, rigid in her prejudices, elevated in her

pride, who at their convent would descend to familiarity with none below the daughters of marquises—this statue, outwardly so cold, but yet with feeling in its marble bosom—this statue, warming to life for a rural Pygmalion like Gilbert, became contemptible in her estimation. For Nicole felt that Gilbert was her inferior in everything but a little reading, and thought that she had condescended very much when she, the waiting-maid of the daughter of a ruined baron, put herself on a level with the son of a poor peasant.

What, then, could she think of her mistress, if she really returned Gilbert's love?

She calculated that, in relating what she had seen to the baron, she should fall into a great error: first, because he would only laugh at the affair, box Gilbert's ears, and turn him out of doors; next, because it would deprive her of her power over Gilbert and Andrée. What pleasure she should have—she, the waiting-maid—in seeing them turn pale or red as her eye fell on them! This idea flattered her pride and soothed her vindictive spirit; and, at this idea, her reflections ceased—she slept.

It was day when she awoke, fresh, light-hearted, and her mind prepared for everything. She took her usual time to dress—that is, an hour. She looked at herself in the piece of broken glass which served as her mirror: her eyes appeared to her more brilliant than ever—her lips had not lost their brightness nor their roundness—her teeth were perfect—her neck, which she took particular care to hide from the sun, was white as a lily. Seeing herself so handsome, she began to think she could easily make her young lady jealous. Thus armed personally and mentally, she opened Andrée's door, as she was authorised to do whenever, at seven o'clock, her mistress had not rung for her.

When Nicole entered the room she stopped in amazement.

Pale, her beautiful hair damp with perspiration, Andrée lay on her bed in a heavy sleep, in which she sometimes writhed as if in pain. She was still in the dress which she had worn the day before. Her breathing was hurried, and now and then a low groan escaped her lips. Nicole looked at her for a minute, then shook her head, for she acknowledged to herself that there could be no beauty which could contest the palm with Andrée's.

She went to the window and opened the shutters. A stream of light poured in, and made Mademoiselle de Taverney's violet-veined eyelids quiver. She awoke—tried to rise, but felt, at the same time, such great weakness and such excessive pain, that she fell back on her pillow with a cry of suffering.

"Oh! mademoiselle, what is the matter?" asked Nicole.

"Is it late?" said Andrée, rubbing her eyes.

"Very late, madame—much later than your usual hour for rising."

"I do not know what is the matter with me, Nicole," said she, looking around her, "I feel so oppressed—so ill!"

Nicole fixed her eyes on her mistress before replying: "It is the commencement of a cold that you have caught, madame, last night."

"Last night!" replied Andrée, surprised; then, looking at her disordered dress, "Have I really lain down without undressing? How could that be?"

"If mademoiselle would reflect——"

"I don't recollect anything about it," replied Andrée, leaning her head on her hand; "what has happened?—am I going mad?" She sat up on the bed, and looked round for the second time all bewildered. Then, after reflecting: "Oh! yes, I remember I was very much tired—very much exhausted yesterday—it was the storm, no doubt—then I fell asleep on

the music-stool at my harpsichord—but, after that, I remember nothing. I must have come up to my room half asleep, and thrown myself on my bed without strength to undress."

"You should have called me, madame," said Nicole; "mademoiselle knows that I am always ready to wait on her."

"I either did not think of it, or had not strength to do it."

"Hypocrite!" muttered Nicole to herself—then she added: "but mademoiselle must have stayed very late at her harpsichord then, for before she came up to her room, hearing a noise, I went down——" She stopped, hoping to discover in Andrée something like agitation—a blush, perhaps: no!—Andrée was calm, and her countenance, that clear mirror of her soul, was undisturbed. "I went down," repeated Nicole.

"Well?"

"Well, madame, you were not at your harpsichord."

Andrée looked up, but there was only surprise to be read in her lovely eyes. "Very strange!" said she.

"It is quite true, however."

"You say I was not in the saloon? but I never left it for a moment till I came to bed."

"Mademoiselle will pardon me for contradicting her."

"But where was I, then?"

"Mademoiselle must know that better than I," said Nicole, shrugging her shoulders.

"You must be wrong, Nicole," said Andrée, mildly; "I only remember feeling cold and stiff, and having great difficulty in walking."

"Oh, but when I saw mademoiselle, she walked very well," said Nicole, almost with a sneer.

"You saw me walk?"

"Yes, indeed, madame."

"But just now you said I was not in the saloon?"

"It was not in the saloon I saw mademoiselle."

"Where, then?"

"In the vestibule, near the staircase."

"I?"

"Yes; I think I ought to know mademoiselle when I see her," said Nicole, with an affected laugh.

"I am certain, however," said Andrée, with great simplicity, after she had again tried to recall the events of the night, "that I did not stir out of the saloon."

"I am, however, quite as certain that I saw mademoiselle in the vestibule—I thought, indeed, she had just come in from a walk in the garden—it was a beautiful night after the storm—and it is very pleasant to walk out when the air is so cool, and when the flowers smell so sweet—is it not, madame?"

"Oh, but you know I dare not walk out at night! I am too timid."

"Mademoiselle might have some one with her, and then she would not be afraid."

"And whom, pray, could I have with me?" asked Andrée, without the least suspicion that she was undergoing a cross-examination.

Nicole was afraid to proceed further in her investigation—Andrée's coolness she thought the height of dissimulation—but she judged it best to give the conversation another turn.

"Mademoiselle was saying that she felt in pain?"

"Yes, indeed, I feel in great pain—and so weak, so low—I did nothing

yesterday but what I do every day, yet I am so tired—perhaps I am going to be ill."

"It may be some sorrow which causes that feeling of weariness—I have felt it myself."

"Oh, you have sorrows, have you, Nicole?"

This was said with a disdainful carelessness which gave Nicole courage to speak more plainly.

"Oh yes, madame," she replied; "yes, I have."

Andrée got slowly out of bed, and, while proceeding to undress, that she might dress again, she said, "Well, let me hear them."

"Indeed I have just come to tell mademoiselle——" She stopped.

"To tell what? You look frightened, Nicole."

"I look frightened, and mademoiselle looks tired; so, doubtless, we are both suffering."

This piece of familiarity displeased Andrée. She frowned slightly, exclaiming, "Oh!"

The intonation of her voice might have made Nicole reflect, but she was not to be daunted.

"Since mademoiselle wishes me to speak, I shall do so."

"Well, go on."

"I wish to get married, madame."

"Oh! Is that what you are thinking of? Why, you are not seventeen yet."

"Mademoiselle is only sixteen, and yet does she not sometimes think of marrying?"

"What reason have you to suppose so?" asked Andrée, severely.

Nicole was just opening her mouth to say something impertinent, but she knew that that would cut short the conversation, which she had no desire should end yet.

"I beg mademoiselle's pardon—I cannot certainly know her thoughts—I am but a country girl—I follow nature."

"That is a strange expression!"

"Is it not natural for a woman to love, and to wish to be loved?"

"Perhaps so. Well?"

"Well; I am in love."

"And the person you love loves you?"

"I think so, madame"—then reflecting that this reply was not decided enough under the circumstances, she added, "Indeed, I am sure of it."

"You are not wasting your time at Taverney, from your own account, Mademoiselle Nicole!"

"One must think of the future, madame; you are a lady, and doubtless some rich relation will leave you a fortune. I must do the best I can for myself."

All this appeared natural enough, and forgetting Nicole's little piece of impertinence, Andrée's goodness of heart began to resume the ascendancy.

"Very true," said she; "but I should like to know who is your choice."

"Ah, you do know him, madame!" said Nicole, fixing her eyes on Andrée.

"I know him."

"Yes, very well."

"Who is it, then?—do not keep me in suspense."

"I am afraid mademoiselle will be displeased."

"I displeased?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Then it is some improper person whom you have chosen?"

"I dare not say that, madame."

"Then tell it without fear. It is the duty of masters to take an interest in the welfare of their dependents who perform their duties satisfactorily—and you know I am satisfied with you."

"You are very kind, madame."

"Well, tell me quickly, and finish lacing me."

Nicole collected all her firmness and all her powers of penetration, as she said, "Well, madame, it is Gilbert whom I have chosen."

To her great surprise Nicole betrayed no emotion of any kind; she only said:

"What, little Gilbert—my nurse's son!"

"Yes, madame, the same."

"And he loves you?"

Now was the decisive moment.

"He has told me so twenty times."

"Well, marry him," replied Andrée, calmly. "I see nothing to prevent it. You have no relations—he is an orphan—you are each of you free from control."

"Certainly," stammered Nicole, quite amazed at the matter ending so differently from what she had expected. "Mademoiselle gives her permission, then?"

"My full permission, only you are both very young yet."

"We shall live longer together."

"And you have neither one nor other any money."

"We shall work."

"What can he work at?—he is good for nothing."

This dissimulation was too much for Nicole. She could not contain herself.

"Mademoiselle must allow me to say that speaking so of poor Gilbert is treating him very ill!"

"It is treating him as he deserves—he is a lazy fellow."

"Oh, mademoiselle, he reads a great deal—he wishes so to be well-informed."

"He will not work."

"For mademoiselle he does all that he can."

"For me?"

"Mademoiselle must know that, when she ordered him to procure game for her every day, and he does so."

"I ordered him?"

"Yes; and he often goes twenty miles for it."

"Indeed! I confess I never thought about it."

"About the game?" asked Nicole, sarcastically.

"What does that witticism mean?" asked Andrée, getting a little impatient, for she felt irritable and unwell.

"I have no wit, madame—wit is for great ladies. I am a poor girl, and tell things plainly as they are," replied Nicole, "and mademoiselle is unjust to Gilbert, who is so very attentive to all her wishes."

"He only does his duty as a servant, if he be so."

"But Gilbert is not a servant, madame; he receives no wages."

"He is the son of an old tenant—he is kept—he is fed, and he does nothing in return. But why defend so warmly this lad, when he was not attacked?"

"Oh, I knew very well that mademoiselle would not attack him."

"More words that I do not understand!"

"Mademoiselle will not understand."

"Enough! Explain this moment what you mean."

"Mademoiselle must certainly have no difficulty to know what I mean."

"I know nothing—and I shall not take the trouble of finding out; you ask my consent to your marriage?"

"Yes, and I would beg of you, mademoiselle, not to be angry with Gilbert for loving me."

"What can it matter to me whether he loves you or does not love you? You are really very tiresome."

"Perhaps mademoiselle has said the same to Gilbert?"

"I!—do I ever speak to your Gilbert?—you are crazy, I think."

"If mademoiselle does not speak to him now, it is not very long since she did speak."

Nicole turned on her a look of ineffable scorn. "You have been trying for an hour to let me hear some specimen of your impertinence; say it at once, I command you."

"But——" began Nicole, a little alarmed.

"You say that I have spoken to Gilbert?"

"Yes, madame, I say so!"

A thought flashed across Andrée's mind, but it was so absurd that she burst into a fit of laughter. "Heaven forgive me!" she exclaimed, "I do believe the poor girl is jealous. Be not uneasy, Legay, I know so little of your Gilbert, that I do not even know the colour of his eyes!" And Andrée felt quite prepared to pardon what she now thought not impertinence, but mere folly. But Nicole did not want to be pardoned, because she looked on herself as the injured person.

"It is not the way to know their colour to look at them by night," said she.

"Did you speak?" asked Andrée, now beginning to understand, but scarcely willing to allow herself to entertain the thought.

"I said that if mademoiselle only speaks to Gilbert at night, she will not see very well what his features are."

"Take care!" said Andrée, turning pale, "and explain instantly what you mean."

"That is easily done. Last night I saw——"

"Be silent—some one calls me!"

In fact, a voice just then called, from the court in front of the house, "Andrée! Andrée!"

"It is the baron, madame," said Nicole, "with the strange gentleman."

"Go down, and say that I cannot appear, that I am indisposed, and then return and let me know the end of this extraordinary history of yours."

"Andrée!" cried her father again, "it is merely the Baron Balsamo, who wishes to bid you good-morning and inquire after your health."

"Go, I tell you," said she to Nicole, and she pointed to the door with the gesture of a queen.

But when Nicole was gone, Andrée felt a strange sensation; she had resolved not to appear, yet she was impelled by an irresistible power to the window left open by her waiting-maid. She saw Balsamo below; he bowed, at the same time fixing his eyes steadily on her. She trembled, and held by the window to prevent herself from falling.

"Good-morning, sir," said she, in reply to his salutation, and just as she pronounced the words, Nicole, whom she had sent to say she should not

appear, advanced towards the gentlemen, looking with open mouth at this instance of caprice in her mistress.

Andrée had scarcely spoken, when she sank deprived of strength on a chair; Balsamo still continued to gaze on her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MORNING.

THE traveller had risen early, in order to look after his carriage, and inquire how Althotas had got on. No one was up at that hour in the castle but Gilbert, who followed with his eyes every movement of the stranger. But he could discover little, as Balsamo closed the carriage door too carefully for his inquisitive looks to penetrate its mystery.

Seeing the baron's abode by the clear light of a sunny morning, Balsamo was struck by the different impression it made on him from what it had done the preceding night. It fact, the little white and red château—for it was built of stone and brick—made a pretty picture, surrounded as it was by a grove of sycamores and laburnums of a large size, the flowers of which hung on the roof of the low building, and girt the towers with a crown of gold. In front of the court there was a small piece of water, surrounded by a broad border of turf and a hedge of acacias, on which the eye rested with pleasure, confined as the view was on this side by the tall chestnut and ash trees of the avenue.

Balsamo turned along a broad walk on the left, and had scarcely advanced twenty paces when he found himself in the midst of a thick shrubbery of maples, palms, and lindens, amongst which the roses and syringas, steeped by the rain of the preceding night, sent forth a delicious perfume. Through the hedge of privet which bordered the walk peeped jasmine and honeysuckle, and in the distance could be seen a long alley, lined with pink hawthorn and wild roses, leading to a wood.

Balsamo at last arrived at the extremity of the demesne. Here, on a slight elevation, stood the massive ruins of an ancient castle, one of the towers of which was still standing almost uninjured, and clothed from its base to its summit with luxuriant shoots of the ivy and wild vine. Viewed from this point, the demesne of Taverney, though but seven or eight acres in extent, wanted neither dignity nor elegance.

After having spent about an hour in examining the ruins, Balsamo was returning towards the house, when he saw the baron leave it by a side-door, his slight frame buried in an Indian flowered dressing-gown, and proceed to prune and arrange his little parterre. He hastened to meet him, and now having still further sounded the poverty of his host, his politeness was more decided in its expression than it had been the night before.

"Allow me, sir," said he, "to offer you my excuses for the trouble I have given you, and, at the same time, my respectful thanks for your hospitality. I should not have ventured to come down before knowing that you were up, but the view of Taverney from my window was so charming, that I could not resist my desire to revisit those imposing ruins, and to see your beautiful garden."

"The ruins," said the baron, after having politely wished the stranger

good-morning—"the ruins, sir, are fine—indeed, the only thing that is fine at Taverney."

"It was a large castle!"

"Yes; it was mine—or rather my ancestors'. They called it Maison-Rouge, which name has long been joined to Taverney—indeed, our barony is Maison-Rouge; but, my dear guest, let us not talk of things no longer in being."

Balsamo bowed in submission.

"Allow me rather to make my excuses to you for your poor accommodation here. I told you beforehand what my house was."

"I have been delighted with it."

"A dog-kennel! a dog kennel, sir! A very favourite place with the rats, since the foxes, lizards, and adders drove them from the other castle! Ah, pardieu! sir, you, who are a sorcerer or something very near it, you certainly ought to raise up with a stroke of your wand the old castle in its glory again—above all, not forgetting the two thousand acres which formerly surrounded it. I'll wager, however, that instead of thinking of doing me such a service, you have been so polite as to go to sleep in an execrable bed!"

"Oh, sir——"

"No—no—don't attempt to say anything in its favour! it is an execrable bed—it is my son's."

"You must permit me to say, that such as the bed is, it appeared to me excellent. I cannot but feel ashamed of having intruded on you, and I am deeply indebted for the kindness with which you have received me. It would give me sincere pleasure to make a return, if it were in my power."

"Well, there is an opportunity," replied the old man, with a mocking smile, and pointing to La Brie, who was coming with a glass of water on a splendid plate of Dresden china, "just turn this into Burgundy, Chambertin, or any other good wine, and you will do me a most essential service."

Balsamo smiled; the old man took the smile for a refusal, and at one draught swallowed the water presented to him.

"An excellent specific," said Balsamo; "water is highest among the elements, for the Holy Spirit was borne on it before the creation of the world. Nothing can resist its action; it penetrates stone, and we may yet discover that the diamond can be dissolved by it."

"I shall be dissolved by it, I fear," replied the baron. "Will you pledge me? The water has some advantages over my wine; it is in capital order, and it is not yet exhausted. It is not like my Maraschino."

"If you had ordered a glass for me as well as for yourself, I might have been able to use it for your advantage."

"Good; explain that for me—is it not still time?"

"Then tell your servant to bring me a glass of very pure water."

"La Brie, do you hear, you old rascal?"

La Brie hastened to obey.

"How!" said the baron, turning to his guest, "does the glass of water which I drink every morning contain any properties, any secrets which are unknown to me? Have I for ten years been making chemical experiments, as Monsieur Jourdain made prose, without being aware of it?"

"I do not know what you have been doing, but you shall see what I can do. Thank you, my good fellow," said Balsamo, taking the glass from La Brie, who had brought it with marvellous rapidity.

He held the glass on a level with his eyes, and seemed to interrogate the water which it contained ; in the sunlight the little beads on its surface were bright as diamonds, and streaked with violet colour.

"Oh, the deuce!" cried the baron, laughing, "can anything beautiful be seen in a glass of water?"

"Yes, baron, to-day, at least, something very beautiful."

And Balsamo appeared doubly attentive in his occupation, the baron, in spite of himself, looking a little serious, and La Brie gazing with open mouth at what was going on.

"What do you see, pray?—I am bursting with impatience to know. A good estate for me? A new Maison-Rouge to set me on foot again?"

"I see something which induces me to beg you to be on the alert."

"Ay!—am I going to be attacked?"

"No ; but this morning you will receive a visit."

"Then, you have yourself ordered some one to meet you here. That was wrong, sir, very wrong. There may be no partridges this morning—remember that!"

"I speak seriously, my dear baron, and what I say is most important—some one is at this moment on the way to Taverney."

"Some one? What sort of a visitor, tell me, pray?—for I must confess (you must have perceived it from the rather sour reception I gave you) that every one annoys me who comes here. So, what sort of visitor? be precise, my dear sorcerer ; if possible, be precise in your description."

"I can very easily tell all you wish," and Balsamo again raised the glass to his searching eye.

"Well, do you see anything?"

"I see everything distinctly."

"Speak, oh speak, sister Anne!"

"I see a lady of great consequence coming."

"Bah! indeed!—coming without being invited?"

"She has invited herself—your son brings her."

"Philip brings her?"

"Yes, himself."

The baron laughed heartily.

"She is brought by my son? The great lady brought by my son."

"Yes, baron."

"You know my son, then?"

"I never saw him in my life."

"And my son at this moment is——"

"Is about a mile off."

"My dear sir, he is in garrison at Strasbourg, and unless he has deserted, which he has not, I can swear, he is bringing nobody hither."

"He is bringing a great lady hither—a very exalted personage. Ah, hold! there is one thing I ought to tell you—you had better keep out of sight that little rogue with the horn at her finger-ends."

"Nicole Legay. Why, pray?"

"Because her features resemble those of the lady who is coming."

"A great lady resemble Nicole!—that is absurd!"

"Why so? I bought a slave once who resembled Cleopatra so much that there was some idea of sending her to Rome to pass for that queen in Octavius's triumph."

"Ah! another attack of your old malady!"

"You must surely see, my dear baron, that this matter cannot concern me—I only speak for your own good."

"But why should Nicole's resemblance to the great lady offend her?"

"Suppose you were the King of France, which I am far from wishing, or the dauphin, which I wish still less, should you be flattered, on entering a house, to find among the servants one whose face was a counterpart of your august visage?"

"Oh, the devil!—that would be a sad dilemma! So, then, you think——"

"I think that the most high and mighty lady who is coming would not be pleased to see her living image in a short petticoat and cotton handkerchief."

"Oh, well," said the baron, still laughing, "we must see about it; but, after all, my dear baron, what delights me most in this affair is, that my son is coming—that dear Philip!—without giving us a note of warning," and he laughed louder than before.

"So you are pleased with my prediction?" said Balsamo gravely. "I am glad of it; but in your place I should set about giving some orders."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"I shall think of it, my dear guest, I shall think of it."

"You have very little time."

"And you are serious, then?"

"No one could be more serious. If you wish to receive the great personage who does you the honour of visiting you properly you have not a minute to lose."

The baron shook his head.

"You still doubt?" asked Balsamo.

"I warn you, you have to do with a most confirmed sceptic." And just then he turned to call his daughter, in order to communicate his guest's prediction to her, as we have before related. We have seen how the young girl replied to her father's invitation, and how Balsamo's gaze had drawn her, as if by fascination, to the window.

Nicole stood looking with amazement at La Brie, who was making signs to her, and trying to understand what had been said.

"I am dreadfully hard of belief," repeated the baron, "and unless I saw——"

"Then, since you must see, look there," said Balsamo, pointing to the avenue, where a horseman appeared galloping towards them.

"Ha!" cried the baron, "there indeed is——"

"Monsieur Philip!" said Nicole, standing on tiptoe.

"My young master!" exclaimed La Brie joyfully.

"My brother, my brother!" cried Andrée, stretching out her arms at the window.

"Is it your son, my dear baron?" asked Balsamo, in a careless tone.

"Yes, pardieu! it is!" exclaimed he, stupefied with astonishment.

"This is but the beginning," said Balsamo.

"You are positively a sorcerer, then," said the baron, more submissively than before.

A triumphant smile hovered on the stranger's lips.

The horse came on at full speed, reeking with moisture, passed the last rows of trees, and, while still in motion, the rider leaped to the ground, and hastened to embrace his father, who only muttered, "What, the devil! what the devil!"

"It is really I," said Philip, who saw his father's perplexity; "it is indeed."

"Doubtless—I see that plainly enough; but what brought you hither at this time?"

"Father, a great honour awaits our house!"

The old man looked up inquiringly.

Philip went on: "In an hour Marie Antoinette Josephe, Archduchess of Austria and Dauphiness of France, will be here."

The baron looked as deeply humbled as he had before looked sarcastic, and, turning to Balsamo, said only, "Pardon me!"

"Sir," returned Balsamo, "I leave you with your son; it is long since you have met, and you must have much to say to each other."

Bowing to Andrée, who, full of joy at the arrival of her brother, had hastened down to meet him, he retired, making a sign to Nicole and La Brie, which they doubtless understood, for they disappeared with him among the trees of the avenue.

CHAPTER XIII.

PHILIP DE TAVERNEY.

PHILIP DE TAVERNEY, Chevalier de Maison-Rouge, did not in the least rosemble his sister, yet was as fine a specimen of manly beauty as she was of feminine loveliness. His features were noble and regular, his figure and carriage graceful in the extreme, and the expression of his eyes was at the same time mild and haughty.

Like all distinguished minds, wearied by the narrow and chilling forms of life, he was disposed to melancholy, without being sad. To this, perhaps, he owed his mildness of temper, for he was naturally proud, imperious, and reserved. The necessity of associating with the poor, his real equals, as with the rich, his equals in rank, had softened a character inclined to be overbearing and scornful.

Philip had scarcely embraced his father when Andrée, roused from her magnetic torpor by his arrival, hastened down to throw herself on his bosom. The sobs which accompanied this action showed how dear he was to the heart of the tender girl.

Philip took her hand and his father's and drew them into the saloon, where, being now alone, he sat down between them.

"You are incredulous, my dear father—you are surprised, my dear sister," said he; "yet nothing is more true than that in a few minutes the dauphiness will be in our poor abode."

"Ventrebleu!" cried the baron; "she must be prevented, whatever it cost! The dauphiness here!—we should be dishonoured for ever! This would be a specimen of the nobility of France to present her! No, no; it must not be. But tell me, what the deuce put my house into her head?"

"Oh, it is a complete romance."

"A romance!" said Andrée; "relate it, brother—my dear good brother!"

"My dear good brother!" repeated the baron; "she seems quite pleased."

"Yes; for is not Philip pleased, my dear father?"

"Because Master Philip is an enthusiast. But for me, who look at things in a more serious manner, I see nothing very agreeable in it."

"You will be of a different opinion when I relate what has occurred."

"Well, relate it quickly," grumbled the old man.

"Yes, yes, relate it!" exclaimed Andrée impatiently.

"Well, I was in garrison at Strasbourg, as you know. Now, you are aware that it was by Strasbourg that the dauphiness was to enter France."

"Know it! How should we know anything in this den?" asked the baron.

"Well, at Strasbourg, brother?" said Andrée.

"Well, we were waiting on the glacis from six in the morning, for we did not know positively at what hour Madame la Dauphine would arrive. It rained in torrents, and our clothes were dripping. The major sent me forward to endeavour to discover the cortège. I had galloped about a league, when all at once, at a turn in the road, I found myself close to the advanced guard of the escort. I spoke a few words to them, and just then her royal highness put her head out of the carriage window, and asked who I was. It seems I had been called to to stop; but I had already set off at full gallop—all my fatigue was forgotten in an instant."

"And the dauphiness?" asked Andrée.

"She is not older than you, and beautiful as an angel."

"But, Philip," said the baron, rather hesitatingly.

"Well, father?"

"Does she not resemble some one you have seen?"

"Some one that I have seen?"

"Yes; endeavour to recollect."

"No, I know no one like Madame la Dauphine!" he exclaimed enthusiastically.

"What! not Nicole, for instance?"

"Ha! that is most strange! Now you say so, I do think she is like her; but oh, so much inferior in beauty and grace! But how could you know that she was like her?"

"Faith! a sorcerer told me."

"A sorcerer?"

"Yes; and he predicted her coming and yours this morning."

"The stranger?" asked Andrée timidly.

"Is it he who was beside you, sir, when I arrived, and who retired so discreetly?"

"Yes, the same; but go on, Philip, go on."

"Perhaps it would be better to make some preparations," said Andrée.

"No—the more you prepare, the more ridiculous we shall appear. Go on, Philip, I tell you!"

"I returned to Strasbourg, and told the governor, the Count de Stainville. We set out immediately to meet her royal highness, and we were at the Kehl gate when the procession came in sight. I was close to the governor."

"Stay!" said the baron; "I once knew a Count de Stainville."

"Brother-in-law to the prime minister, the Duke de Choiseul."

"It is the same. Go on, then, go on."

"The dauphiness, who is young, perhaps likes young faces, for she listened very inattentively to the governor, and all the time fixed her eyes on me, although I kept respectfully in the background. Then, pointing to me, she said, 'Is not that the gentleman who was the first to meet me?' 'Yes, madame,' replied the governor. 'Approach, sir,' said she. I approached her. 'What is your name?' asked the dauphiness, in the sweetest voice I ever heard. 'The Chevalier de Taverney Maison-Rouge,' I replied, stammering. 'Pray take a note of that name on your tablets, my dear friend,' said the dauphiness, turning to an old lady, who, I have since learned, is the Countess de Langershausen, her governess. My

name was written. Then, turning again to me, she said, 'Ah, sir, you have suffered very much from your exposure to this frightful weather : I am extremely sorry for having been the cause of it.'"

"Oh, how good the dauphiness must be ! What kindness and consideration !" said Andrée, with delight.

"Very well, very well indeed," muttered the baron, with a smile indicative of a father's partiality, and, at the same time, of his bad opinion of women, and even of queens. "But go on, Philip."

"What did you say ?" asked Andrée.

"I said not a word ; I bowed to the very ground. She passed on."

"What ! you said nothing ?" exclaimed the baron.

"I had no voice, I assure you, sir ; my heart beat so rapidly—I was so much agitated."

"What the devil ! do you think I had nothing to say when, about your age, I was presented to the Princess Leczinska ?"

"But, sir, you had always a great deal of wit," Philip replied.

Andrée pressed his hand.

"I profited by her royal highness's departure," continued Philip, "to hasten to my apartment and change my clothes ; for I was wet to the skin and covered with mud from head to foot."

"Poor dear brother !" whispered Andrée.

"When the dauphiness," Philip continued, "reached the town-hall, she had to receive the congratulations of the principal inhabitants ; that being over, it was announced that dinner was served. A friend of mine, the major of my regiment, since told me that, whilst at table, she looked several times round on the officers who were present, and at last she said, 'I do not see the young officer who was sent to meet me this morning ; has he not been told that I wished to thank him ?' The major stepped forward. 'Madame,' said he, 'Lieutenant de Taverney was obliged to retire and change his dress, that he might present himself in a more suitable manner before you.' A moment after, I entered the room, and I had not been five minutes in it when the dauphiness perceived me. She made a sign to me to approach ; I obeyed. 'Sir,' said she, 'should you object to follow me to Paris ?' 'Oh, madame,' I cried, 'it would only make me too happy ; but I am in garrison at Strasbourg, and I am not my own master.' 'Well, I shall arrange that matter with the governor ;' and she made a gesture for me to retire. In the evening she said to the governor, 'Sir, I have a vow to fulfil, and you must assist me in it.' 'I shall consider it a sacred duty, madame,' he replied. 'You must know,' she continued, 'that I made a vow to take into my own service the first Frenchman, whoever he should be, whom I should meet on touching the soil of France, and that I would make him and his family happy, if, indeed, princes can make any one happy.' 'Madame,' said the governor, 'princes are God's representatives on earth ; but may I ask,' continued he, 'who was the person who had the good fortune to be first met by your royal highness ?' 'The Chevalier de Taverney Maison-Rouge, a young lieutenant.' 'We shall all be jealous of the Chevalier de Taverney, madame,' replied the governor, 'but we shall not place any obstacle in the way of his high fortune ; the ties which engage him here shall be broken, and he shall depart at the same time as your highness. So the day on which the dauphiness left Strasbourg, I was ordered to accompany her on horseback, and since then have never left the door of her carriage."

"Oh !" said the baron, with his former singular smile, "strange enough, but not impossible !"

"What, father?"

"Oh, never mind!"

"But, brother," said Andrée, "I don't see what all this has to do with the dauphiness coming hither."

"Wait till you hear. Yesterday morning we arrived at Nancy about eleven o'clock, and were passing through the town by torch-light. The dauphiness called me to her. 'I wish,' said she 'to depart early to-morrow morning.' 'Your highness is going to make a long march, then?' 'No—but I wish to stop on the road, and can you guess where?' she asked, smiling. 'No, madame.' 'I mean to stop at Taverney, to see your father and sister.' 'My father and my sister!—what—your royal highness knows——' 'I have made inquiries, and know that they live only two hundred paces from the road which we are travelling.' The perspiration broke on my forehead, and trembling, as you may suppose, I hastened to reply, 'My father's house, madame, is not worthy to receive so great a princess—we are poor.' 'So much the better,' replied she; 'I shall therefore, I am certain, be received more cordially and more simply; however poor you may be, there will be always a cup of milk for a friend who wishes to forget for a moment that she is Archduchess of Austria and Dauphiness of France.' 'Oh, madame,' said I. This was all—respect forbade me to go farther."

"Stupid fellow!" cried the baron.

"One might have thought that her royal highness guessed what was passing in my mind, for she added: 'Do not be afraid; I shall not stay long; but since you think that I shall suffer any inconvenience by this visit, it is only fair, for I caused you to suffer on my arrival at Strasbourg.' Who could resist such charming words, father?"

"Oh, it would have been impossible!" cried Andrée; "she is so sweet, so good, she will be satisfied with my flowers and a cup of my milk, as she says."

"Yes; but she will not be very well satisfied with my chairs, which will dislocate her bones, and my hangings, which will disgust her. Devil take all whims! So! France will be well governed with a woman who takes such caprices. Plague on it! A strange reign it will be, to judge from the commencement," said the baron, angrily.

"Oh, father, how can you say such things of a princess who is honouring us so highly?"

"Who is dishonouring us, rather!" cried the old man. "Taverney was forgotten, buried under the ruins of Maison-Rouge. I intended that if it came to light again it should be in a suitable manner, and now the whims of a girl are going to drag us into day—dusty, shabby, wretched!—and the gazettes, on the watch for everything absurd, will amuse their readers with the visit of a great princess to this den of Taverney. Cordieu! I have an idea——"

The young people started at the manner in which he pronounced these words.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Philip.

The baron muttered to himself—"If the Duke of Medina burnt his palace that he might embrace a queen, I may well burn my kennel to get rid of the visit of a princess. Let her come!—let her come!"

Philip and Andrée only heard the last words, and they looked at each other uneasily.

"It cannot be long before she be here, sir," said Philip. "I took the way through the wood, in order to get some minutes in advance of the cortège; it will soon be here."

"Then I must not lose time," said the baron; and, with the agility of twenty, he left the saloon. He hastened to the kitchen, snatched a flaming piece of wood from the hearth, and proceeded to his barns; but just as he raised his arm to throw it into a heap of straw, he was seized by Balsamo, who flung to a safe distance the burning brand.

"What are you about, sir," cried he; "the Archduchess of Austria is not a Constable de Bourbon, whose presence contaminates, so that we should rather burn our house than permit her to enter it!"

The old man stopped, pale, trembling, and his habitual smile banished from his lips; he had gathered all his strength to enable him to resolve on making his poverty yet greater by the destruction of his dwelling, rather than be disgraced, according to his ideas, by allowing its mediocrity to be seen.

"Come, sir, come," continued Balsamo; "you have only time to throw off your dressing-gown and put yourself in better trim. The Baron of Taverney, whom I knew at the siege of Philipsbourg, wore the grand cross of the order of St. Louis—any coat will be rich and elegant when decorated with that."

"But, sir, shall I show to our dauphiness that poverty which I wished to hide from you?"

"Be not uneasy, we shall manage to occupy her attention so that she shall not know whether your house be new or old, poor or rich. Be hospitable, sir, it is your duty as a gentleman! What will the enemies of the dauphiness—and she has many—what will they do, if her friends burn their castles rather than receive her under their roof? Let us not thus anticipate that vengeance which is to come!—everything in its predestined time."

The baron again showed an involuntary submission to Balsamo, and hurried to his children, who, uneasy at his absence, were seeking him on every side.

As to Balsamo, he retired in silence, like a man intent on some work which he had undertaken, and which he must complete.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARIE ANTOINETTE JOSEPHE, ARCHDUCHESS OF AUSTRIA.

As Balsamo had said, there was no time to be lost, for now on the road—generally so peaceful—which led to the Baron of Taverney's dwelling, a great sound of carriages, horses, and voices was heard.

Three carriages, one of which was covered with gilding and mythological bas-reliefs, and which, notwithstanding its magnificence, was not less dusty and bespattered than the others, stopped at the great gate of the avenue. Gilbert held it open, his eyes distended, his whole frame trembling with feverish agitation at the sight of so much magnificence. Twenty gentlemen on horseback, all young and splendidly dressed, drew up near the principal carriage, from which a young girl of sixteen, dressed with great simplicity, but with her hair elaborately piled on her forehead, got out, assisted by a gentleman in black, who wore, saltier-wise, under his mantle, the ribbon of St. Louis.

Marie Antoinette, for it was she, brought with her a reputation for beauty which the princesses destined to share the thrones of the kings of

France have not always possessed. It was difficult to say whether her eyes were beautiful or not, yet they were capable of every expression, more particularly of the opposite expressions of mildness and scorn. Her nose was finely formed, her upper lip beautiful, but the lower lip, her aristocratic inheritance from seventeen emperors, was too thick and prominent. Her complexion was lovely; her neck, shoulders, and bust were of marble whiteness and beautifully formed; her hands truly regal. At times, when roused to energy, her carriage was majestic, firm, and decided: at other times, when not excited, soft, undulating—one might almost say caressing. No woman ever made a more graceful courtesy —no queen ever bowed with more tact and discrimination. This day the most expressive sweetness shone in her countenance. She had resolved to be only the woman, and to forget the dauphiness. She wore a dress of white silk, and her beautiful bare arms supported a mantle of rich lace.

Scarcely had she touched the ground when she turned to assist one of her ladies of honour whom age had weakened a little, and, refusing the arm of the gentleman in black, she advanced, inhaling the fresh air, and looking around as if determined to enjoy to the utmost the few moments of freedom with which she was indulging herself.

"Oh, what a beautiful situation!" she exclaimed; "what magnificent trees! and such a pretty little house! How happy one might be in this healthful air, under those trees, which form so sweet a retirement!"

At this moment Philip appeared, followed by Andrée, on whose arm the baron leaned. She was dressed in a simple gown of grey silk, and the baron in a coat of blue velvet, the remains of some of his old magnificence; he had not forgotten Balsamo's recommendation, and wore his ribbon of St. Louis. On seeing the three approach, the dauphiness stopped. Her escort then grouped itself around her—the officers holding their horses by the bridles, and the courtiers, hat in hand, whispering to one another. Philip drew near, pale with agitation, yet with a noble bearing.

"With your royal highness's permission," said he, "I have the honour of presenting to you the Baron de Taverney Maison-Rouge, my father, and Claire Andrée de Taverney, my sister."

The baron bowed profoundly, like a man who knew how to bow to queens. Andrée showed, in her graceful timidity, the most flattering kind of politeness—sincere respect. Marie Antoinette looked at the two young people, and recalling what Philip had said of their poverty, she guessed what they suffered at that moment.

"Madame," said the baron, with dignity, "your royal highness does too much honour to the Château of Taverney—such an humble abode is not worthy to receive so much rank and beauty."

"I know that it is the abode of an old soldier of France," replied the dauphiness, "and my mother, the Empress Maria Theresa, who was a distinguished warrior, has told me that often in your country those richest in glory are the poorest in meaner treasures," and with ineffable grace she extended her lovely hand to Andrée, who, kneeling, kissed it.

The baron was, however, still haunted by the idea which had so much tormented him, that the train of the dauphiness was about to crowd into his little house, in which there could not be found chairs for a fourth of their number. The dauphiness hastened to relieve him from all embarrassment.

"Gentlemen," said she, turning to those who formed her escort, "I must not impose on you the trouble of following me in all my caprices. You will wait here, if you please; in half an hour I shall return. Come with

me, my good Langershausen," she added in German to the lady whom she had assisted out of the carriage, "and you, sir," said she to the gentleman in black, "have the goodness to follow us!"

This personage, though dressed thus simply, was remarkable for the elegance of his manners, and was about thirty years of age, and very handsome. He drew to one side to allow the princess to pass. Marie Antoinette took Andrée for her guide, and made a sign to Philip to come near his sister.

As to the baron, he was left to the personage of high rank, doubtless, to whom the dauphiness had granted the honour of accompanying her.

"So you are a Taverney Maison-Rouge?" said he, playing with his splendid ruffles of the most expensive lace, and turning to the baron with truly aristocratic impertinence.

"Must I reply, sir, or my lord?" asked the baron, with equal impertinence.

"You may say simply prince, or your eminence, which you choose," the other replied.

"Well, then, your eminence, I am a Taverney-Maison-Rouge! a real one!" said the baron, in that tone of raillery which he so seldom abandoned.

His eminence, who had the usual tact of great nobles, felt that he had to do with no country clown, and continued, "This is your summer residence?"

"Summer and winter," answered the baron, who wished to put an end to disagreeable queries, but accompanying each reply with a low bow.

Philip could not help turning from time to time uneasily towards his father, for the house, as they drew nearer it, wore an aspect threatening and ironical, as if pitilessly determined to show all their poverty. The baron had already resignedly extended his hand to point the way to the door of his house, when the dauphiness, turning to him, said, "Excuse me, sir, if I do not enter; these shades are so delightful that I could pass my life in them. I am tired of rooms. For fifteen days I have been received in rooms—I, who love the open air, the shade of trees, and the perfume of flowers." Then, turning to Andrée, "You will bring me a cup of milk here, under these beautiful trees—will you not?"

"Your highness," said the baron, turning pale, "how should we dare to offer you such poor refreshment?"

"I prefer it, sir, to anything else. New-laid eggs and milk formed my banquets at Schoenbrunn."

All at once La Brie, swelling with pride, in a splendid livery and a napkin on his arm, appeared under an archway of jessamine, the shade of which had attracted the eye of the dauphiness. In a tone in which importance and respect were strangely mixed, he announced, "Her royal highness is served!"

"Am I in the dwelling of an enchanter?" cried the princess, as she ran rather than walked to the perfumed alley.

The baron, in his uneasiness, forgot all etiquette, left the gentleman in black, and hurried after the dauphiness. Andrée and Philip looked at one another with mingled astonishment and anxiety, and followed their father.

Under the clematis, jessamine, and woodbine was placed an oval table, covered with a damask cloth of dazzling whiteness, on which was arranged, in a brilliant service of plate, a collation the most elegant and rare. There were exotic fruits made into the most delicious confections; biscuits from Aleppo, oranges from Malta, and lemons of extraordinary size, all arranged

in beautiful vases. Wines, the richest and most esteemed, sparkled like the ruby and the topaz, in decanters ornamented and cut in Persia, and in the centre, in a silver vase, was placed the milk for which the dauphiness had asked.

Marie Antoinette looked around and saw surprise and alarm imprinted on the face of her host, and on the countenance of his son and daughter. The gentlemen of her escort were delighted with what they saw, without understanding it, and without endeavouring to understand it.

"You expected me, then, sir?" said she to the baron.

"I, madame!" stammered he.

"Yes; you could not in ten minutes have all this prepared, and I have only been ten minutes here," and she looked at La Brie with an expression which said, "above all, when you have only one servant!"

"Madame," answered the baron, "your royal highness was expected, or rather, your coming was foretold to me."

"Your son wrote to you?"

"No, madame."

"No one knew that I was coming here, as I did not wish to give you the trouble which I see I have done. It was only late last night that I expressed my intention to your son, and he reached this but half an hour before me."

"Scarcely a quarter of an hour, madame."

"Then some fairy must have revealed to you what was to occur. Mademoiselle's godmother, perhaps?"

"Madame," said the baron, offering a chair to the princess, "it was not a fairy who announced my good fortune to me."

"Who, then?" asked she, observing that he hesitated.

"An enchanter, madame!"

"An enchanter—how can that be?"

"I know nothing of the matter, for I do not meddle with magic myself, yet to that, madame, I am indebted for being able to entertain your highness in a tolerable fashion."

"In that case we must not touch anything, since the collation is the work of sorcery. His eminence," added she, pointing to the gentleman in black, who had fixed his eye on a Strasbourg pie, "seems in a hurry to begin, but we shall assuredly not eat of this enchanted collation, and you, dear friend," turning to her governess, "distrust the Cyprus wine, and do as I do!" and she poured some water from a globe-formed carafe with a narrow neck into a golden goblet.

"In truth," said Andrée, with alarm, "her royal highness is perhaps right!"

Philip trembled with surprise, and ignorant of what had passed the evening before, looked alternately at his father and his sister for explanation.

"But I see," continued the dauphiness, "his eminence is determined to sin, in spite of all the canons of the Church."

"Madame," replied the prelate, "we princes of the Church are too worldly to be able to believe that Heaven's wrath will fall on us about a little refreshment for the body, and, above all, too humane to feel the least inclination to burn an honest sorcerer for providing us with good things like these!"

"Do not jest, I pray, monseigneur," said the baron. "I swear to you that a sorcerer—a real sorcerer—foretold to me, about an hour ago, the arrival of her royal highness and my son!"

"And has an hour been sufficient for you to prepare this banquet?" demanded the dauphiness. "In that case you are a greater sorcerer than your sorcerer!"

"No, madame, it was he who did all this, and brought the table up through the ground, ready served as you see."

"On your word, sir?"

"On the honour of a gentleman!" replied the baron.

"Ha!" said the cardinal, in a serious tone, putting back the plate which he had taken, "I thought you were jesting. Then you have in your house a real magician?"

"A real magician!—and I should not wonder if he has made all the gold on that table himself."

"Oh, he must have found out the philosopher's stone!" cried the cardinal, his eyes sparkling with covetousness.

"See how the eyes of his eminence sparkle! He who has been seeking all his life for the philosopher's stone!" said the dauphiness.

"I confess to your royal highness," replied his very worldly eminence, "that nothing interests me more than the supernatural—nothing is so curious, in my estimation, as the impossible."

"Ah! I have traced the vulnerable part, it seems!" said the dauphiness; "every great man has his mysteries, particularly when he is a diplomatist—and I—I warn your eminence, know a greal deal of sorcery. I sometimes find out things—if not impossible, if not supernatural, at least incredible!" and the eye of the dauphiness, before so mild, flashed as from an internal storm, but no thunder followed. His eminence alone doubtless understood what this meant, for he looked evidently embarrassed. The dauphiness went on:

"To make the thing complete, M. de Taverney, you must show us your magician—where is he? In what box have you hidden him?"

"Madame," answered the baron, "he is much more able to put me and my house in a box, than I to put him!"

"In truth, you excite my curiosity," said Marie Antoinette. "I must positively see him!"

The tone in which this was uttered, although still retaining the charm which Marie Antoinette knew so well to assume, forbade all idea of refusal to comply with her wish.

The baron understood this perfectly, and made a sign to La Brie, who was contemplating with eager eyes the illustrious guests, the sight of whom seemed to make up to him for his twenty years of unpaid wages.

"Tell Baron Joseph Balsamo," said his master, "that her royal highness the dauphiness desires to see him." La Brie departed.

"Joseph Balsamo!" said the dauphiness. "What a singular name!"

"Joseph Balsamo!" repeated his eminence, as if reflecting, "I think I know that name."

Five minutes passed in silence—then Andrée felt a thrill run through her frame—she heard, before it was perceptible to other ears, a step advancing under the shade of the trees—the branches were put aside—and Joseph Balsamo stood face to face with Marie Antoinette.

CHAPTER XV.

MAGIC.

BALSAMO bowed humbly; but no sooner had he raised his head than he fixed his bright, expressive eyes firmly but respectfully on the face of the dauphiness, and waited calmly until she should interrogate him.

"If it is you of whom the Baron de Taverney has been speaking to us, draw near, sir, that we may better see what a magician is."

Balsamo advanced another step and bowed.

"Your profession is to foretell events, sir?" said the dauphiness, regarding him with more curiosity than she would herself have been willing to acknowledge, and sipping some milk which had been handed her.

"It is not my profession, but I do foretell events."

"We have been brought up in an enlightened creed," said the dauphiness, "and the only mysteries in which we believe are those of the Catholic faith."

"They are to be venerated," replied Balsamo reverently; "but here is Monseigneur the Cardinal de Rohan, who will tell your royal highness, though he be a prince of the Church, that they are not the only mysteries which deserve to be regarded with respect."

The cardinal started; he had not told his name, it had not been pronounced, yet this stranger knew it. Marie Antoinette did not appear to remark this circumstance, but continued:

"You will confess, sir, that at least they are the only mysteries which cannot be controverted?"

"Madame," answered Balsamo, with the same respect, "as well as faith there is certainty."

"You speak rather obscurely, sir. Although thoroughly French in heart, I am but indifferently acquainted with the niceties of the language, and must beg you to be less enigmatic if I am to comprehend you."

"And I, madame, would entreat that all may remain unexplained. I should deeply regret to unveil to so illustrious a princess a future which might not correspond to her hopes."

"This becomes serious," said Marie Antoinette; "the gentleman wishes to excite my curiosity, that I may command him to tell my fortune."

"God forbid that your royal highness should force me to do it!"

"Yes," replied the dauphiness; "for you would be rather puzzled to do it!" and she laughed.

But the dauphiness's laugh died away without meeting an echo from any of the attendants. Every one present seemed to submit tacitly to the influence of the singular man, who was, for the moment, the centre of general attraction.

"Come, confess it frankly," said the dauphiness.

Balsamo bowed.

"Yet it was you who predicted my arrival to the Baron de Taverney," resumed Marie Antoinette, with a slight movement of impatience.

"Yes, madame, it was I."

"And how did he do it?" she added, turning to the baron, as if she felt the necessity of a third party taking share in this strange dialogue.

"Very simply, madame—merely by looking in a glass of water."

"Was it so?" she asked of Balsamo.

"Yes, madame," answered he.

"Then, having read the future for the Baron de Taverney in a glass of water, surely you can read it for me in a decanter."

"Perfectly well, madame."

"And why refuse to do so?"

"Because the future is uncertain; and if I saw a cloud on it——" He stopped.

"Well?"

"It would give me pain to sadden your royal highness."

"Have you known me before, or do you now see me for the first time?"

"I have had the honour of seeing your royal highness when a child, in your native country, with your august mother."

"You have seen my mother, then?"

"I have had that honour. She is a great and powerful queen."

"Empress, sir."

"I used the word queen in reference to the heart and mind; and yet——"

"Reservations concerning my mother?" said the dauphiness haughtily.

"The greatest hearts have weaknesses, madame, particularly where they think the happiness of their children is concerned."

"History, I trust, sir, will not discover one single weakness in Maria Theresa."

"Because history will not know what is known only to the Empress Maria Theresa, to your royal highness, and to myself."

"We have a secret, sir! we three!" said the dauphiness, smiling disdainfully.

"We three, madame!" replied Balsamo solemnly.

"Come, then, tell this secret, sir!"

"It will then be no longer one."

"No matter; tell it!"

"Is it your royal highness's will?"

"It is."

Balsamo bowed. "There is in the Palace of Schoenbrunn," said he, "a cabinet, called the Dresden cabinet, on account of the splendid vases of porcelain which it contains——"

"Yes," said the dauphiness; "go on."

"This cabinet forms a part of the private suite of rooms of the Empress Maria Theresa; in it she writes her letters."

"Yes."

"On a certain day, about seven in the morning, when the empress had not yet risen, your royal highness entered this cabinet by a door through which you alone were permitted to pass; for your highness is the favourite daughter of her imperial majesty."

"Well, sir?"

"Your highness approached a writing-desk, on which lay open a letter which her imperial majesty had written the night before. Your royal highness read that letter; and doubtless some expressions in it must have been displeasing to you, for you took a pen, and with your own hand erased three words."

The dauphiness blushed slightly. "What were the words erased?" she asked anxiously.

"They were too condescending, doubtless, and showed too great affection for the person to whom they were addressed. This was a weakness, and to this it was I alluded in speaking of your august mother."

"Then you remember the words?"

"Assuredly."

"Repeat them to me."

"They were: *My dear friend.*"

Marie Antoinette bit her lip and turned pale.

"Shall I tell your royal highness to whom the letter was addressed?"

"No; but you may write the name."

Balsamo drew out a pocket-book with gold clasps, and, having written some words on one of the leaves, he tore it out, and, bowing, presented it to the dauphiness. Marie Antoinette unfolded the leaf, read it, and looked with astonishment at the man who, though he bowed low before her, seemed to have it in his power to direct her fate.

The letter was addressed to the mistress of King Louis XV.—*To the Marchioness de Pompadour.*

"All this is true, sir," said Marie Antoinette, after a pause; "and although I am ignorant by what means you have become acquainted with these circumstances, I cannot speak falsely, and I must declare that what you have said is true."

"Then," said Balsamo, "will your royal highness permit me to retire, satisfied with this harmless proof of my art?"

"No, sir," replied the dauphiness; "the more I know of your powers, the more desirous I become to have my fate foretold. You have spoken only of the past; let me learn what the future will be."

The princess spoke these words with a feverish impatience, which she in vain endeavoured to conceal from her auditors.

"I am ready, if your royal highness commands me, to declare it; yet let me supplicate you not to do so."

"I have never expressed a command twice; and you will recollect, sir, that I have already commanded once."

"Let me at least consult the oracle whether it may be revealed to your royal highness or not," he said entreatingly.

"Good or bad, sir," replied Marie Antoinette, "I will know it. If good, I shall take it for flattery; if bad, I shall hold it as a warning, and shall be obliged to you for it. Begin!"

Balsamo took the round carafe with the narrow neck, and placed it on a golden saucer; the rays of the sun, striking on this, shone dimly yellow in the water, and seemed to offer something worthy of deep consideration to the attentive soothsayer. Everyone was silent. At length he placed the carafe again on the table, and shook his head.

"Well, sir?" said the dauphiness.

"I cannot speak it," replied Balsamo.

"You cannot, because you have nothing to tell me," replied Marie Antoinette, a little contemptuously.

"There are things which must never be said to princes, madame," replied Balsamo, in a tone which seemed to express his determination to oppose her wishes.

"Yes, when those things, I repeat, may be expressed by the word *nothing*."

"It is not that which prevents me, madame; on the contrary, it is the very reverse."

The dauphiness smiled disdainfully, Balsamo appeared embarrassed, the cardinal began to laugh outright, and the baron drew near, grumbling:

"So, my magician has exhausted himself! His powers have not lasted

very long! It only remains for us to see all these fine things turned into vine-leaves, as we have read in Eastern tales."

"I should rather have had the simple vine leaves," said Marie Antoinette, "than these fine things displayed by the gentleman for the purpose of getting himself presented to me."

"Deign to remember, madame," replied Balsamo, who was deadly pale, "that I did not solicit this honour."

"It was not difficult for you to guess, sir, that I should ask to see you."

"Pardon him, madame," said Andrée, in a low voice; "he thought he was doing right."

"And I tell you he was doing wrong," replied the princess, so as only to be heard by Andrée and Balsamo. "No one can elevate himself by humiliating an old man; and when we can have the pewter goblet of a gentleman to drink in, we need not the golden one of a mountebank!"

Balsamo started, as if a viper had bitten him. "Madame," said he, greatly agitated, "I am ready to let you know your destiny, since your blindness impels you to desire such knowledge."

He pronounced these words in a tone so firm and so threatening, that all present felt the blood chilled in their veins.

"*Gib im kein gehœr, meine Tochter,*"* said the old lady to Marie Antoinette.

"*Lass sie hœren, sie hat wissen wollen, und so soll sie wissen,*"† replied Balsamo.

These words, spoken in German, a language which was understood by only a few present, seemed to render more mysterious what was going on.

"No," said the dauphiness, resisting the entreaties of her venerable governess; "let him say what he desires to say;—were I now to permit him to be silent, he would believe me afraid."

Balsamo heard these words, and a dark furtive smile played for a second on his lips. "It is as I said," he muttered to himself, "the courage of bravado merely."

"Speak!" said the dauphiness; "speak, sir."

"Then your royal highness is decided?"

"I never go back from a decision once made."

"In that case, madame, I would entreat that we may be alone."

She made a sign which those around understood—all retired.

"This is not a bad plan for obtaining a private audience," said the dauphiness, turning to Balsamo; "is it not, sir?"

"I would beg your royal highness not to irritate me!" replied Balsamo; "I am but an instrument of Providence to enlighten you on those sorrows which await you. Insult fortune, if you will—she can revenge herself; but for me, I am but the gloomy herald of the misfortunes she has in store for you."

"Then it appears that misfortunes await me?" said the dauphiness, mildly, touched by Balsamo's respectful manner.

"Yes—terrible misfortunes."

"First—will my family be happy?"

"That which you have left, or that to which you are going?"

"Oh, my own family—my mother, my brother Joseph, my sister Caroline?"

"Your misfortunes will not reach them."

"They are mine alone, then?"

* "Do not listen to him, my daughter."

† "Let her—she wishes to know, and she shall know."

"They are yours, and those of your new family."

"The royal family of France includes three princes, the Duke de Berry, the Count de Provence, and the Count D'Artois, what will be their fate?"

"They will all reign."

"Then I shall have no children?"

"You will have children."

"Not sons."

"Some of them sons."

"My sorrows, then, will be caused by their death?"

"You will grieve that one is dead, but most will you grieve that the other lives."

"Will my husband love me."

"Yes, too well."

"Shall I not, then, be able to bear my grief, supported by my husband and my family?"

"Neither will support you."

"The love of my people will still be mine?"

"The people!—the ocean in a calm!—have you seen the ocean in a storm, madame?"

"By doing good I shall prevent the storm; or, if it rise, shall rise above it!"

"The higher the wave the deeper the abyss."

"God will defend me."

"Alas! there are heads which he himself foredooms!"

"What mean you, sir; shall I not, then, be queen?"

"Yes, madame, but would to heaven that you were not to be!"

She smiled disdainfully.

"Did you remark," he continued, "the tapestry of the first room in which you slept after having entered France?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did it represent?"

"The slaughter of the innocents."

"Have not the grim faces of the murderers haunted your memory?"

"I confess that they have."

"Had you not a storm on the way hither?"

"Yes; a thunderbolt fell, and nearly on my carriage."

"Were not those omens?"

"Fatal omens?"

"It would be difficult to interpret them as happy ones!"

The dauphiness let her head fall on her bosom, and raising it after a minute's silence, "Speak!" said she; "in what manner shall I die?"

He shook his head.

"Speak!"

"I dare not."

"It is my will that you should," she said, imperiously.

"Have mercy—have mercy on yourself!"

"Speak, sir, or I shall say that all this is but an absurd fable. Take care!—the daughter of Maria Theresa is not to be jested with!—the woman who holds in her hand the destiny of thirty millions of men is not to be trifled with!"

He continued silent.

"You know no more," she said, contemptuously; "your imagination is exhausted."

"My knowledge of the future is not exhausted, madame; and if you will force me——"

"Yes, I will hear all."

He seized the carafe on the golden saucer, placed it in a dark hollow, where some rocks formed a sort of grotto; then he took the hand of the archduchess, and drew her under the vault.

"Are you ready?" he asked the princess, who was alarmed by his rapid movements.

"Yes."

"On your knees, then!—on your knees!—and pray to God to spare you the dreadful end of all your greatness, which you are now to witness!"

She obeyed mechanically, and fell on both knees.

He pointed with a wand to the glass globe, in the centre of which must have appeared some dark and terrible form, for the dauphiness, in trying to rise, trembled and sank again to the ground with a shriek of horror—she had fainted.

The baron hastened to her assistance, and in a few minutes she came to herself. She put her hand to her forehead, as if to recall her thoughts, then suddenly exclaimed, "The carafe!—the carafe!"

The baron presented it to her. The water was perfectly limpid—not a stain mingled with it. Balsamo was gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BARON DE TAVERNEY THINKS HE SEES AT LAST A SMALL OPENING INTO THE FUTURE.

THE baron was the first to perceive that the dauphiness had fainted, he had kept on the watch, more uneasy than any one else at what might take place between her and the sorcerer. Hearing her cry of terror, and seeing Balsamo spring out of the grotto, he ran to the spot.

The dauphiness's first request was to see the carafe; her second, that no injury should be done the magician; and it was well she made this request, for no sooner had Philip heard her cry than he bounded after him like an angry lion.

When her lady of honour came near, and ventured to question her in German, she only drew from her that Balsamo had in no way been wanting in respect to her—that she thought the storm of the preceding night, and her long journey, had fatigued her and brought on a nervous attack. Her replies were translated to the Cardinal de Rohan, who stood by, but dared not himself ask for information. In courts, people are obliged to be satisfied with half answers, so what the dauphiness said satisfied nobody, but every one appeared perfectly satisfied. Philip then drew near and said—

"I am obliged to obey your royal highness's orders, yet it is with regret that I do so—the half-hour during which you intended to stay is past, and the horses are ready."

"Thanks, sir," said she, with a smile full of fascinating languor, "but I must alter my determination—I do not feel able to set out just now—if I could sleep for a few hours, I should be quite restored."

"Your royal highness knows what a poor abode ours is," the baron stammered out.

"Oh, sir, any place will do—a little rest is all I want!" She said this as if again fainting, and her head sank again on her bosom.

Andrée disappeared to prepare her room for her, and having in a few minutes returned, she stood beside the dauphiness, not daring to speak until some indication was given that she might do so. At length Marie Antoinette raised her head, smiled to Andrée, and, with her hand, made a sign to her to draw nearer.

"The room is ready for your royal highness—we entreat only——"

But she was not permitted to finish her apology—the dauphiness interrupted her.

"Thank you!—thank you! May I ask you to summon the Countess of Langershausen, and to lead us to the apartment?"

Andrée obeyed—the old lady of honour advanced. "Give me your arm, my dear friend," said the dauphiness to her in German, "for indeed I have scarcely strength enough to walk without support."

The baroness obeyed; Andrée approached to assist her. Turning soon after to Andrée, the dauphiness asked—

"Do you understand German, then, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, madame, I even speak it a little," replied Andrée, in German.

"That is delightful!" exclaimed the dauphiness, "that makes my plan still more agreeable."

Andrée dared not ask her august guest what her plan was, although she longed to know it. The dauphiness leaned on the arm of the Countess de Langershausen, and advanced slowly, her limbs trembling under her. As she issued from the trees in front of the grotto, she heard the cardinal's voice.

"What!" said he, "Count de Stainville, do you mean to insist on speaking to her royal highness, notwithstanding her orders to the contrary?"

"I must insist on doing so," replied the governor of Strasbourg, in a firm voice, "her royal highness will pardon me, I am certain."

"And I, sir, on the contrary, insist——"

"Let the governor come forward," said the dauphiness, appearing at the opening of the trees, which formed a verdant arch above her head. "Come forward, Count de Stainville."

Every one bowed at her command, and drew back to allow free passage to the brother-in-law of the then all-powerful minister who governed France. The count looked around, as if to request a private audience. Marie Antoinette understood that he had something important to say to her, but before she could express a wish to be left alone, all had withdrawn.

"A despatch from Versailles, madame," said the count in a low voice, and presenting a letter which he had kept concealed under his plumed hat.

The dauphiness took it, and read the address. "It is for you, sir, not for me," she said; "open it and read it, if it contain anything that concerns me."

"The letter is addressed to me," he replied, "but in the corner is a mark agreed on between my brother, Madame Choiseul, and myself, indicating that the letter is for your royal highness."

"True; I did not observe it."

She opened the letter, and read the following lines: "The presentation of Madame Dubarry is decided on, if she can only procure some noble lady to present her. We still hope she may not find one; but the only sure means to prevent the presentation will be for her royal highness the dauphiness to make all speed. Her royal highness once at Versailles, no one will dare to offer such an insult to the court."

"Very well," said the dauphiness, folding up the letter, without the slightest symptom of emotion, or even of interest.

"Will your royal highness now retire to repose a little?" asked Andrée, timidly.

"No, I thank you, mademoiselle; the air has revived me; I have quite recovered," and abandoning the arm of her lady-of-honour, she walked forward firmly and rapidly. "My horses immediately!" said she.

The cardinal looked with inquisitive surprise at the count.

"The dauphin is becoming impatient," whispered the latter, and this falsehood appearing a secret confided to him alone, his eminence was satisfied. As to Andrée, her father had taught her to respect the whims of crowned heads, and she was not at all surprised at the change in Marie Antoinette's intentions. The latter, therefore, turning, and seeing no alteration in the sweet expression of her countenance, said:

"Thanks, mademoiselle; your hospitable reception has made a deep impression on me."

Then, turning to the baron, she continued:

"Sir, you must know, that on leaving Vienna, I made a vow to advance the fortune of the first Frenchman whom I should meet on the frontiers of France. That Frenchman was your son. But I do not intend to stop there—your daughter shall not be forgotten either."

"Oh, your highness!" murmured Andrée.

"Yes, I mean to make you one of my maids-of-honour. You are noble, are you not?" she added, again addressing the baron.

"Oh, your highness!" cried the baron with delight, for all his dreams seemed realised by what he heard; "although poor, our descent is unblemished; yet so high an honour——"

"It is only due to you. Your son will defend the king as you have done; your daughter will serve the dauphiness—the one you will inspire with every loyal sentiment, the other with every virtuous one. Shall I not be faithfully served, sir?" she said, turning to Philip, who knelt in gratitude at her feet, without words to express his emotion.

"But——" murmured the baron—for his feelings did not prevent him from reflecting.

"Yes, I understand," said the dauphiness, "you have preparations to make, yet they cannot take long."

A sad smile passed over the lips of Andrée and Philip, a bitter one over those of the baron, and Marie Antoinette stopped, for she felt that she might unintentionally have wounded their pride.

"At least," she resumed, "if I may judge by your daughter's desire to please me. Besides, I shall leave you one of my carriages; it will bring you after us. I must call the Count de Stainville to my aid."

The count approached.

"I shall leave one of my carriages for the Baron de Taverney, whom I wish to accompany me to Paris with his daughter. Appoint some one to accompany their carriage, and to cause it to be recognised as belonging to my suite."

"Come forward, Monsieur de Beausire!"

"This very moment, madame," answered the count.

A young man, of about five-and-twenty years of age, with an easy and graceful carriage, and a lively and intelligent eye, advanced, hat in hand, from the ranks of the escort of the dauphiness.

"Let one of the carriages remain behind," said the count, "for the Baron de Taverney; you will accompany the carriage yourself."

"And, sir," said the dauphiness, "join us again as soon as possible. I authorise you to have double relays of horses, if necessary."

The baron and his children were profuse in their acknowledgments.

"This sudden departure will not put you to much inconvenience, I hope, sir," said the dauphiness.

"We are too happy to obey your royal highness's orders," replied the baron.

"Adieu! adieu!" said she, with a smile. "Gentlemen, conduct me to my carriage. Chevalier de Taverney, to horse!"

Philip kissed his father's hand, embraced his sister, and leaped lightly into his saddle.

The glittering train swept on, and in a quarter of an hour had disappeared like an evening vapour; there remained no human being in the avenue of Taverney but a young man, who, sitting on one of the low pillars of the gate, pale and sorrowful, followed with a longing eye the last cloud of dust which was raised by the horses' feet, and which served to show the road they had taken. The young man was Gilbert.

Meantime, the saloon of Taverney presented a singular scene. Andrée, with clasped hands, reflected on the unexpected and extraordinary event which had so suddenly interrupted the course of her calm life, and she believed herself in a dream. The baron was pulling some hairs, which were rather too long, out of his grey eyebrows, and settling the bosom of his shirt. Nicole, leaning against the door, looked at her master and mistress, and La Brie, with his arms hanging down and his mouth open, looked at Nicole.

The baron was the first to rouse himself from his reverie.

"Scoundrel!" cried he to La Brie, "are you standing there like a statue, and that gentleman, one of the king's body-guard, waiting without?"

La Brie made a bound towards the door, got one leg hooked in the other, staggered to his feet, and disappeared. In a short time he returned.

"What is the gentleman doing?" asked the baron.

"Making his horse eat the pimpernels."

"Leave him alone, then. And the carriage?"

"It is in the avenue."

"The horses harnessed?"

"Yes, sir—four horses—such beautiful animals!—they are eating the pomegranates."

"The king's horses have a right to eat whatever they like. By-the-bye, the sorcerer?"

"He is gone, sir."

"And has left all the plate on the table! It is not possible. He will return, or will send some one for it."

"I don't think he will, sir. Gilbert saw him set out with his wagon."

"Gilbert saw him set out with his wagon!" the baron repeated, in a thoughtful tone.

"Yes, sir."

"That wretch, Gilbert, sees everything. Go and pack my trunk."

"It is packed, sir."

"What!—it is packed?"

"Yes, as soon as I heard what her royal highness the dauphiness said, I went into your room, and packed your clothes and linen."

"Who told you to do so, you officious rascal?"

"Dame, sir! I thought I was only anticipating your orders."

"Fool! Go, then, and help my daughter."

"Thank you, father; but I have Nicole."

The baron began to reflect again.

"But, zounds, scoundrel! it is impossible."

"What is impossible, sir?"

"What you have not thought of, for you think of nothing."

"But what is it, sir?"

"That her royal highness would go without leaving something with Monsieur de Beausire, or the sorcerer without leaving a message with Gilbert."

At this moment a low whistle was heard from the courtyard.

"What is that?"

"It is a call for me, sir," replied La Brie.

"And who calls, pray?"

"The gentleman, sir."

"The gentleman left by the dauphiness?"

"Yes, sir. And here is Gilbert coming as if he had got something to say to you."

"Go, then, stupid animal!"

La Brie obeyed with his usual alacrity.

"Father," said Andrée, approaching him, "I know what troubles you. Recollect, I have thirty louis-d'ors, and that beautiful watch set with diamonds, which Queen Marie Lezinska gave my mother."

"Yes, my dear, yes!" replied the baron; "but keep them, keep them. You must have a handsome dress for your presentation. I may discover some means—hush! here is La Brie."

"Sir," cried La Brie as he came in, holding in one hand a letter, and in the other some money, "see what the dauphiness left for me—ten louis-d'ors, sir!—ten louis-d'ors!"

"And that letter, rascal?"

"Oh, the letter is for you, sir—from the sorcerer."

"From the sorcerer? Who gave it you?"

"Gilbert, sir."

"I told you so, stupid animal! Give it me—give it me!"

He snatched the letter, tore it open, and read these words:

"SIR,—Since a hand so august has touched the plate I left with you, it belongs to you; keep it as a relic, and remember sometimes your grateful guest.

"JOSEPH BALSAMO."

"La Brie!" cried the baron, after a moment's reflection, "is there not a good goldsmith at Bar-le-Duc?"

"Oh, yes, sir, the one who soldered Mademoiselle Andrée's silver brooch!"

"Very well! Andrée, lay aside the goblet out of which her royal highness drank, and let the rest of the service be put up in the carriage with us. And you, beast that you are, help the gentleman outside to a glass of what remains of our good wine."

"One bottle, sir," said La Brie, with deep melancholy.

"That is enough."

"Now, Andrée," said the baron, taking both his daughter's hands, "courage, my child. We are going to court: there are plenty of titles to be given away there; rich abbeys—regiments without colonels—pensions going to waste. It is a fine country, the court! The sun shines brightly there; put yourself always in its rays, my child; for you are worthy to be seen. Go, my love, go!"

Andrée went out, followed by Nicole.

"Hallo! La Brie, you monster!" cried the baron; "attend to the gentleman, I tell you."

"Yes, sir," answered La Brie from a distant part of the cellar.

"I," continued the baron, going towards his room, "must go and arrange my papers. We must be out of this hole in an hour. Do you hear, Andrée? And we are leaving it in good style, too. What a capital fellow that sorcerer is! I am becoming as superstitious as the devil. But make haste, La Brie, you wretch!"

"I was obliged to go feeling about, sir, in the cellar; there is not a candle in the house."

"It was time to leave it, it appears," said the baron.

CHAPTER XVII.

NICOLE'S TWENTY-FIVE LOUIS-D'ORS.

In the mean time Andrée made active preparations for her departure, and Nicole assisted her with an ardour which quickly dissipated the little cloud that had arisen between them in the morning.

"She is a good girl," said Andrée to herself, "devoted and grateful; she has faults, but what human creature has not? Let me forget them."

Nicole was not a girl who was slow to observe the expression of her mistress's face. "Fool that I was!" said she to herself; "I was nearly quarrelling with my young lady, and all about that young good-for-nothing Gilbert! and she going to Paris, and will take me with her! One is sure of making one's fortune in Paris."

Andrée was the first to speak.

"Put my lace in a bandbox," said she.

"What bandbox, mademoiselle?"

"Really, I don't know. Have we one at all?"

"Oh, yes—the one you gave me; it is in my room."

And Nicole ran to bring it with an obliging air, which disposed Andrée still more in her favour.

"But this bandbox is your own," said Andrée, when she reappeared with the article in her hand, "and you may want it yourself, my poor Nicole."

"Oh, you have more need of it, mademoiselle; and besides, it ought to be yours—you lent it me."

"When people get married and set up housekeeping, they require many little things; so just now you have most need of the box. Keep it to put your bridal finery in."

"Oh, mademoiselle," said Nicole, gaily, shaking her head, "my finery will not take up much room."

"But if you marry, Nicole, I should wish you to be happy,—and rich."

"Rich?"

"Yes, rich according to your rank."

"Then you have found some fermier-general for me, mademoiselle?"

"No! but I have found a dowry."

"Indeed, mademoiselle?"

"You know what is in my purse?"

"Yes, madame; twenty-five shining louis-d'ors."

"They are yours, Nicole."

"Twenty-five louis-d'ors!" cried Nicole, with rapture; "it is indeed a fortune!"

"My poor girl! I am glad you think so."

"And you really give them to me, madame?"

"I wish I could give you more."

Nicole felt surprised—moved; the tears came to her eyes; she seized her young lady's hand and kissed it.

"Do you think your husband will be satisfied?"

"Oh, quite satisfied!" said Nicole. "At least, I hope so."

She reflected that Gilbert had doubtless refused her hand through fear of poverty, and that now when she was rich matters would turn out differently. Then she determined immediately to offer him a share of her young lady's generous gift, and to attach him to her by gratitude. Such was Nicole's generous plan. Andrée looked at her as she reflected. "Poor girl!" sighed she; "may she be happy in her simple life!"

Nicole heard the words and started from her reverie. They opened to her fancy a whole Eldorado of silks, diamonds, lace, and love—things of which Andrée had not thought. But Nicole turned away her eyes from the gold and purple cloud brightening her horizon, and resisted the temptation. "After all, madame," said she, "I shall be happy here—in an humble way."

"Reflect seriously on what you are going to do."

"Yes, mademoiselle, I shall reflect on it."

"That is right. Make yourself happy in the way you propose, if you can; but do not be foolish."

"You are very kind, mademoiselle. And let me say now, that I was very foolish this morning; but I hope mademoiselle will forgive me. When one is in love——"

"Then you are really in love with Gilbert?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; I—I loved him," said Nicole.

"Is it possible!" said Andrée, smiling. "What can you see to admire in the young man? The first time I meet him I must take a look at this M. Gilbert who steals young girls' hearts."

"Is he not going with us to Paris, mademoiselle?" inquired Nicole, who wished to be fully informed on every point before taking the step she meditated.

"Of what use would he be there? He is not a domestic, and could not take charge of a horse in Paris. Idle people at Taverney live like the birds; however poor the soil, it feeds them. But in Paris an idle person would cost too much—we could not support him."

"But if I marry him?" stammered Nicole.

"Well, if you marry him, you shall live here with him at Taverney. You shall take care of this house which my mother was so fond of."

Andrée pronounced these words in so firm a voice, that Nicole could no longer doubt. Yet she hesitated before speaking again. Andrée, seeing her hesitation, thought that her mind was wandering from the pleasures of a Parisian life to those of the quiet country, and that she knew not how to decide. So she went on gently: "Nicole, the decision which you are now to make will affect all your future life. Be not hasty: I shall give you one hour: it is little, but you are prompt, and I think it will be sufficient to enable you to choose between continuing to serve me or having a husband—between me and Gilbert."

"An hour! Oh, yes, mademoiselle, I can decide in an hour."

"Collect all my clothes, and my mother's! I would not leave behind those

NICOLE'S TWENTY-FIVE LOUIS-D'ORS.

relics so dear to me. Then go, and return in an hour fully decided ; but whatever your determination be, here are your twenty-five louis-d'ors. If you marry, they shall be your dowry ; if you continue in my service, your wages for two years."

Nicole took the purse from Andrée's hands and kissed it. Then she completed her task,—not a great one, certainly,—hurried downstairs, and Andrée saw her cross the courtyard and enter the avenue. Not finding Gilbert there, she flew to a window on the ground-floor, which was that of his room, and tapped at it. He was bustling about with his back to the window ; but hearing her drumming, he turned, and like a thief caught in the fact, he quickly abandoned his occupation.

"Oh, is it you, Nicole?" said he.

"Yes, it is!" she replied, smiling, but with something very decided in her tone.

"You are welcome," said he, coming forward and opening the window.

Nicole felt that there was kindness in his reception of her, and held out her hand : he took it, pressed it—"This is a good beginning," thought she, "farewell my journey to Paris!" and to Nicole's praise, it must be said, she did not sigh at this thought.

"You know," said the young girl, leaning her elbows on the window ; "you know, Gilbert, that the family are leaving Taverney and going to Paris?"

"Yes, I know."

"Well, I am to go to Paris too."

"I did not know that ; but I congratulate you if you are pleased at going."

"How you say that!"

"I say it plainly, I think—if you are pleased at going."

"My being pleased depends——"

"Why do you stop? depends——?"

"My being pleased or not depends on you."

"I don't understand you," said Gilbert, seating himself on the window so that his knees touched Nicole's arm, and they could thus converse unseen and unheard.

Nicole looked at him tenderly—he shook his head, insinuating that he understood her look no more than her words.

"Well," said she, "since all must be told, listen to what I am going to say."

"I hear you," replied Gilbert, coldly.

"In plain words, my young lady offers to take me to Paris with her——"

"Very well—go on!"

"Unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless I get married here."

"Then you still think of getting married?" he answered, quite unmoved.

"Yes, more particularly since I have become rich."

"Oh, you have become rich?" he asked, so phlegmatically, that Nicole knew not what to think.

"Very rich, Gilbert!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"And how did that miracle come about?"

"My young lady has given me a marriage portion."

"You are very fortunate. I congratulate you, Nicole."

"Look!" said she, pouring out of the purse into her hand the twenty-five louis-d'ors, and watching Gilbert's eyes to discover some ray of pleasure or covetousness in them.

Gilbert moved not a muscle. "On my word, it is a nice little sum!" said he.

"And that is not all," continued Nicole. "The baron will be rich once more; the old castle will be rebuilt, and the care of it given——"

"To the fortunate husband of Nicole," said Gilbert, with an irony not so well concealed but that it grated on Nicole's fine ear; yet she restrained her anger.

"And Nicole's husband—do you not know him?"

"I? No."

"Have you, then, grown stupid, or do I no longer speak French?" cried the young girl, who began to show symptoms of impatience.

"I understand you perfectly," replied Gilbert; "you offer to make me your husband, do you not, Mademoiselle Legay?"

"Yes, Monsieur Gilbert."

"And it is since you have become rich that you have thought of this," returned Gilbert, hastily. "I am truly grateful to you indeed—I am indeed!"

"Well," said Nicole frankly, and holding out her hand, "take it!"

"I?"

"You accept it, do you not?"

"No; I refuse it!"

Nicole sprang up from her leaning position. "Gilbert," said she, "you have a bad heart; and, trust me, what you now do will not bring you happiness. If I felt any warmer sentiment, in making the offer I have just done, than a sense of duty and honour, trust me, I would now be miserable indeed; but, having become rich, I did not wish it to be said that Nicole would look down on her old friend Gilbert. However, all is now over between us."

Gilbert made a gesture of indifference.

"What I think of your conduct in the matter, you must be well aware. I, whose character you know to be as free and independent as your own, had decided to bury myself here, from an old prepossession for you, when I had it in my power to go to Paris, which may be for me a scene of triumph! I would have borne to see before me, every day of the year, for a whole lifetime, that cold and impenetrable face, the mask of so many wicked thoughts. You have not felt that there was any sacrifice in this; so much the worse for you, Gilbert! I do not say that you will regret me; but remember, you may yet feel remorse for the contempt and scorn you have shown me! Guided by you, I should have been a virtuous, happy, and contented woman; now, I am abandoned on the ocean of life, without a keeping or a guiding hand! Gilbert, if I fall, God will not hold you innocent of my fall! Farewell!"

And the proud young girl turned away, without anger or impatience, but having shown, as all impassioned natures do in the time of trial, true generosity of soul.

Gilbert shut his window quietly, and returned to the mysterious occupation in which she had interrupted him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FAREWELL TO TAVERNEY.

NICOLE, before entering her mistress's apartment, stopped on the staircase to subdue some gathering emotions of resentment rising in her bosom. The baron encountered her as she stood motionless, thoughtful, her brows contracted and leaning on her hand, and, seeing her so pretty, he kissed her, as the Duke de Richelieu would have done at thirty years of age. Roused from her reverie by this piece of gallantry, Nicole hurried up to Andrée's room, and found her just closing her trunk.

"Well," said Mademoiselle de Taverney, "have your reflections ended?"

"Yes, madame," replied Nicole, very decidedly.

"You will marry?"

"No, madame."

"What! after all your first love?"

"My love will never do for me what the kindness of mademoiselle has done for me. I belong to you, mademoiselle, and wish always to belong to you. I know the mistress I have: I do not know the master I might have."

Andrée was touched with this unlooked-for exhibition of affectionate feeling in the giddy Nicole, and was far from suspecting that this choice had been a forced one. She smiled, pleased to find one human being better than she had expected.

"You do well, Nicole," she replied, "to attach yourself to me. I shall not forget this trust to me; and if any good fortune befall me, you shall share it."

"Oh, mademoiselle, I have quite decided I will go with you!"

"Without regret?"

"Blindly."

"I do not like that answer, Nicole. I should not wish you at some future day to reproach yourself with having blindly trusted me and followed me."

"I shall never have to reproach any one but myself, mademoiselle."

"Then you have had an explanation with your lover? I saw you talking with him."

Nicole blushed, then bit her lip. She forgot that Andrée's window was opposite that at which she had spoken to Gilbert.

"It is true, mademoiselle," replied Nicole.

"And you told him all?"

Nicole thought Andrée had some particular reason for this question, and, all her former suspicions returning, she answered, "I told him I would have nothing more to do with him."

It was plain that the two women would never understand each other—the one pure as the diamond, the other without any fixed principle of conduct, though having occasional impulses of goodness.

In the meantime, the baron had completed all his arrangements. An old sword, which he had worn at Fontenoy, some parchments establishing his right to travel in his majesty's carriages, and a litter of old papers, formed the most bulky part of his baggage. La Brie followed, tottering under the weight of an almost empty trunk. In the avenue they found the gentleman of the king's body-guard, who, whilst waiting, had drained

to the last drop his bottle of wine. The gallant had remarked the fine waist and pretty ankle of Nicole, who was going back and forward with messages, and he had kept peeping about in the hope of exchanging a word with her. He was roused, however, to more active occupation by the baron's request that he would order the carriage to the door; he started, bowed, and in a sonorous voice summoned the coachman.

The carriage drew up. La Brie put the trunk on behind with an indescribable mixture of joy and pride in his looks. "I am really," murmured he, carried away by his enthusiasm, and thinking he was alone, "going to get into the king's carriage!"

"Behind it, behind it, my worthy friend!" replied Beausire, with a patronising smile.

"What, sir, are you going to take La Brie with you?" said Andrèe. "Who will take care of Taverney?"

"Why, pardieu! the good-for-nothing philosopher."

"Gilbert?"

"Yes; has he not a gun?"

"But how will he live?"

"By his gun, to be sure! Don't be uneasy—he will have excellent fare blackbirds and thrushes are not scarce at Taverney."

Andrée looked at Nicole; the latter began to laugh. "And is that all the compassion you show for him, ungrateful girl?"

"Oh, mademoiselle," replied Nicole, "he is very clever with his gun—he will not die of hunger!"

"But, sir," continued Andrée, "we must leave him two or three louis-d'ors."

"To spoil him? Very fine indeed! He is vicious enough as he is!"

"He must have something to live on," persisted Andrée.

"The neighbours will help him, if he is in want."

"Don't be uneasy, madame," said Nicole; "he will have no cause to ask their assistance."

"At all events," replied Andrée, "leave him two or three crowns."

"He would not accept them."

"He would not accept them? Then he is proud, this Mr. Gilbert of yours."

"Oh, mademoiselle, he is not mine, Heaven be praised!"

"Come, come!" said the baron, "let Gilbert go to the devil! The carriage is waiting; get in, my love."

Andrée did not reply. She cast a farewell look on the old château, and then got into the heavy and ponderous carriage. The baron seated himself beside her. La Brie, still wearing his splendid livery, and Nicole, who seemed never to have known such a person as Gilbert, mounted on the box. The coachman rode one of the horses as postilion.

"But Monsieur l'Exempt, where shall he sit?" exclaimed the baron.

"On my horse, sir, on my horse," replied Beausire, still eyeing Nicole, who coloured with delight at having so soon replaced a rude peasant admirer by an elegant gentleman.

The carriage, drawn by four strong horses, started into rapid motion. The trees of the avenue glided away on each side, and disappeared one by one, sadly bending before the east wind, as if to bid farewell to their owners who abandoned them. The carriage reached the gate. Gilbert stood there, upright, immovable, his hat in his hand. He did not seem to see Andrée, yet he watched her least movement; her eyes were fixed on the dear home she was leaving, so as to keep it in view as long as possible.

"Stop an instant!" cried the baron to the postilion.

The carriage stopped.

"So, Monsieur Good-for-nothing, you are going to be happy—quite alone, like a real philosopher! Nothing to do—nobody to scold you. Don't let the house take fire; and, hark ye, take care of Mahon!"

Gilbert bowed, but did not reply. He felt as if Nicole's looks were a weight too great to be borne—he feared to meet her triumphant ironical smile, as he would the touch of red-hot iron.

"Go on, postilion!" cried the baron.

Nicole did not smile—it even required more than her habitual power over herself to prevent her expressing aloud her pity for the poor young man thus heartlessly abandoned. She was obliged to keep her eye on Monsieur de Beausire, who looked so well on his prancing horse.

Now, as Nicole kept her eyes fixed on M. de Beausire, she did not see that Gilbert was gazing, his soul in his eyes, on Andrée. Andrée saw nothing but the house in which she was born—in which her mother died. The carriage disappeared. Gilbert, a moment before of so little importance in the eyes of the travellers—was now nothing to them.

The baron, Andrée, Nicole, and La Brie having passed through the gates of the avenue, entered a new world. Each had a peculiar subject for reflection. The baron thought that at Bar-le-Duc he could easily raise five or six thousand crowns on Balsamo's plate. Andrée repeated a prayer her mother had taught her, to keep away the demon of pride and ambition. Nicole covered her neck more closely with her handkerchief, to the great chagrin of M. de Beausire. La Brie, with his hand in his pocket, counted over the ten louis-d'ors of the dauphiness, and the two of Balsamo. M. de Beausire galloped at the side of the carriage.

Gilbert closed the gates of Taverney, whose hinges, as usual, creaked with a melancholy sound. Then he ran to his little room, pulled out his oaken chest of drawers, behind which he found a bundle ready tied up in a napkin, and slung it on his stick. After this, pushing his hands into his hay-stuffed mattress, he drew out something wrapped in a bit of paper—it was a shining crown-piece—his savings for three or four years. He opened the paper—looked at his crown to assure himself that it had not been changed, and then put it in his pocket, still wrapped in its paper.

Mahon, on seeing Gilbert, began to howl loudly, making furious leaps the whole length of his chain. Seeing one by one his friends leave him, his fine instinct told him that Gilbert was also about to abandon him, and he howled louder and louder.

"Hush!" cried Gilbert, "hush, Mahon!"

Then smiling bitterly at the parallel which occurred to his mind, he muttered, "Have they not abandoned me like a dog? Why should not I abandon thee like a man?" But, after a minute's reflection, he added, "They abandoned me free, at least—free to seek for food. Well, then, Mahon, I will do for thee what they did for me, neither more or less;" and going to the hook to which the dog's chain was fastened, he slipped it off. "You are free!" said he; "provide for yourself as you like!"

The dog bounded towards the house; but, finding the doors all closed, he sprang towards the ruins and disappeared.

"And now," said Gilbert, "we shall see which has most instinct—the dog or the man!"

So saying, he went out by the small gate—closed it—double-locked it, and threw the key over the wall.

But nature speaks with the same voice in almost all hearts. Gilbert felt

something like what Andrée experienced in leaving Taverney, only with her sentiments mingled regret for the quiet past, with his hopes for a more stirring future.

"Farewell!" said he, turning to look for the last time at the chateau, whose pointed roof appeared peeping over the sycamores and laburnums, "farewell! abode in which I have suffered so much, where every one hated me and threw me food grudgingly, as if I had been a hungry hound. Be cursed!—my heart bounds with joy at my freedom, for thy walls enclose me no more! Farewell! prison!—hell!—den of tyrants! Farewell for ever!"

And after this imprecation, Gilbert sprang forward on the road which the carriage had taken, fancing that he yet heard the roll of its distant wheels.

CHAPTER XIX.

GILBERT'S CROWN-PIECE.

AFTER half-an-hour's headlong race, Gilbert uttered a wild shriek of joy; he saw the carriage about a quarter of a league before him, slowly ascending a hill. He felt his heart dilate with pride, as he thought that he, with only youth, strength, spirit, was about to do all that wealth, power, and rank could accomplish. Then, indeed, might the baron have called Gilbert a philosopher, had he seen him, his stick on his shoulder, his small bundle slung on it, walking on with rapid strides, leaping down every slope which could shorten his path, and stopping at every ascent, chafing with impatience, as if saying to the horses, "You do not go fast enough for me; see, I am obliged to wait for you."

Philosopher? Yes! and he deserved the name, if it be philosophy to despise all that contributes to ease and to enjoyment. It was an interesting spectacle, one worthy of the Creator of energetic and intelligent creatures, to see the young man bounding forward on his way, all dusty and panting, for an hour or more, until he had overtaken the carriage, and then resting with delight when the horses were compelled to pause for breath. Gilbert that day must have inspired every one with admiration who could have followed him in spirit as we do; and who knows but that even the proud Andrée might have been moved could she have seen him, and that her contempt for his indolence would have changed to admiration of his energy?

The day passed on in this manner. The baron stopped an hour at Bar-le-Duc, which gave Gilbert time to get in advance of him. He had heard the order to stop at the goldsmith's; so, having passed the town, by a detour, without entering it, he hid in a thicket until he saw the carriage coming, and when it had passed, followed it as before. Towards evening it came up with the train of the dauphiness, at the little village of Brillon, the inhabitants of which were crowded on a neighbouring hill, and made the air resound with their shouts of welcome. Gilbert had not eaten a morsel during the entire day, except a morsel of bread which he had brought with him from Taverney; but, in return, he had drunk plentifully from a rivulet which crossed the road, and the water of which was so fresh and limpid, that Andrée had requested that the carriage might stop, and alighted herself to fill the chased cup, the only article of Balsamo's service which the baron could be persuaded to retain. Gilbert saw all this, hidden

by some trees on the road-side. Then, when the carriage had passed on, he emerged from his hiding-place, and advancing to the stream, at the same spot where Mademoiselle Taverney had stood, he lifted the water in his hand, and drank from the same source.

Evening came on, shrouding the landscape in her dusty mantle, until at last he saw nothing but the light from the large lanthorns which were fastened on each side of the carriage; this pale gleam, ever hurrying onward in the distance, looked like a phantom impelled forward by some strange destiny. Then night came on. They had travelled twelve leagues; they were at Combles. The equipages stopped—Gilbert was sure that it was for the night, that he should have time to stop for a couple of hours in a barn, and how vigorously should he afterwards pursue his way! He approached to listen for Andrée's voice—the carriage still continued stationary. He glided into a deep doorway; he saw Andrée by the glare of the torch-light, and heard her asking what hour it was. A voice replied, "Eleven o'clock." At that moment Gilbert no longer felt fatigue, and would have rejected with scorn an offer of a seat in a vehicle. Versailles already appeared in view—Versailles, all gilded, shining, the city of nobles and kings!—and beyond appeared Paris, grim, immense—the city of the people!

Two things roused him from his ecstasy—the noise of the carriages setting out again, and the complaints of his stomach, which cried "hunger!" very distinctly. On went the carriages, Gilbert following, his hunger unappeased. At midnight they stopped at Saint Dizier. For the night? No! only to change horses; whilst, in the meantime, the illustrious travellers took a little refreshment by torch-light.

Gilbert had need of all his courage, and he sprung to his feet from the bank where he had seated himself, as he heard them depart, with an energy of determination which made him forget that, ten minutes before, his wearied legs had bent under him in spite of all his efforts.

"Well," cried he, "go, go!—I shall stop also for refreshment at Saint Dizier; I shall buy some bread and a slice of bacon; I shall drink a glass of wine, and for five sous I shall be refreshed as well as *the masters.*"

Gilbert entered the town. The train having passed, the good folks were closing their doors and shutters; but our philosopher saw a good-looking inn not yet shut up, where the large dishes of fowls and other things showed that the attendants of the dauphiness had only had time to levy a very slight contribution. He entered the kitchen resolutely; the hostess was there, counting what her gains had been.

"Excuse me, madame; but can I have some bread and ham?" said Gilbert.

"We have no ham, but you can have fowl."

"No, thank you; I ask for ham because I wish for ham—I don't like fowl."

"That is a pity, my little fellow, for we have only fowl; but it shall not be dearer," she added, smiling, "than ham. Take half-a-one, or, indeed, take a whole one for tenpence, and that will be provision for you for to-morrow. We thought her royal highness would have stayed all night, and that we should have sold all these things to the attendants; but, as she only just passed through, they will be wasted."

One would have thought that, the offer being so good, and the hostess so kind, Gilbert would have gladly embraced it; but that would be to have misunderstood his character entirely.

"No, thank you," replied he, "I shall satisfy myself in a more humble manner; I am neither a prince nor a footman."

"Well, then," said the good woman, "I will give you the fowl, my little Artaban."

"I am not a beggar either," replied he, in a mortified tone, "I buy what I wish, and pay for it."

And he majestically plunged his hand into his breeches' pocket; it went down to the elbow—in vain he fumbled in his vast pocket, turning paler and paler. The paper in which the crown had been, he found—but the crown was gone! Tossed about by his rapid movements, it had worn the paper, then the thin lining of his pocket, and had slipped out at his knee; for he had unfastened his garters to give freer play to his limbs.

His paleness and trembling touched the good woman. Many in her place would have rejoiced at his pride being brought down; but she felt for him, seeing suffering so powerfully expressed in the changes of his countenance.

"Come, my poor boy!" said she, "you shall sup and sleep here; then, to-morrow, if you must go on, you shall do so."

"Oh, yes, yes!" exclaimed Gilbert, "I must go on—not to-morrow, but now—now!"

And snatching up his bundle without waiting to hear more, he darted out of the house, to hide his shame and grief in the darkness. He rushed on, alone, truly alone in the world; for no man is more alone than he who has just parted with his last crown—more particularly if it be the only one he ever possessed.

To turn back to look for his crown would have been to begin a hopeless task—besides, it would make it impossible for him ever to come up with the carriages. He resolved to continue his way. After he had gone about a league, hunger, which his mental suffering had made him forget for a time, awoke more keen than ever. Weariness also seized on every limb—on every sinew; yet, by incredible efforts, he had once more come in sight of the carriages. But fate, it would seem, had decided against him. They stopped only to change horses, and so quickly, that he had not five minutes to rest himself.

Again he set out. The day began to dawn—the sun appeared above a broad circle of dark clouds, foretelling one of those burning days of May which sometimes precede the heats of summer. How could Gilbert bear the noon of that day? In his pride he thought that horses—men—the destinies—had united against him—him alone! Like Ajax, he shook his clenched fist at the heavens; and if he did not say, like him, "I shall escape in spite of the gods!" it was because he knew by heart *The Social Contract* better than the Odyssey. At last, however, as Gilbert had dreaded, the moment arrived when he found the utter impossibility of proceeding much farther. By a last and almost despairing effort, he summoned up all his remaining force, and once more overtook the carriages of which he had previously lost sight, and which, under the influence of his heated and feverish imagination, he fancied were surrounded with a strange, fantastic halo. The noise of the wheels sounded like thunder in his ears, and almost maddened his brain; he staggered on, his blackened lips wide apart—his eyes fixed and staring—his long hair clinging to his forehead, bathed in perspiration—and his movements seeming rather the effect of some clever piece of mechanism than those of a thinking being. Since the evening before he had travelled upwards of twenty leagues, and his weary and fainting limbs now refused to carr him farther. A mist

overspread his eyes—strange noises sounded in his ears—the earth seemed to reel under him—he endeavoured to utter a cry, and staggered forward, beating the air wildly with his arms. At last his voice returned to utter hoarse cries of rage against his conquerors. Then, tearing his hair with both hands, he reeled forward, and fell heavily to the ground—with the consolation of having, like a hero of antiquity, fought the battle to the last!

"Hallo, there! Hallo, madman!" cried a hoarse voice just as he fell, accompanying his shouts with the loud cracking of a whip.

Gilbert heard him not—he had fainted.

"Hallo! I say—hallo! Morbleu! the fellow will be smashed!" And this time his words were accompanied by a vigorous lash, which reached Gilbert's waist, and cut into the flesh.

But Gilbert felt nothing—he remained immovable under the feet of the horses of a carriage, which was issuing into the high road from a by-way between Thieblemont and Vauclere.

A shrill cry was heard from the carriage, which the horses carried along like a whirlwind. The postilion made an almost superhuman effort, but could not prevent one of the horses, which was placed as a leader, from leaping over Gilbert. The other two, however, he succeeded in pulling up. A lady stretched her body half out of the carriage. "Heavens!" cried she, "you have killed the poor boy!"

"Why, faith, madame," replied the postilion, endeavouring to discover the body amidst the cloud of dust which the horses' feet had raised, "I am almost afraid we have."

"Poor creature—poor boy. Do not move a step farther!" and opening the door of the carriage herself, she sprang out.

The postilion had already alighted, and dragging Gilbert's body from between the wheels, he expected to find it bruised and bloody; the lady assisted him with all her force.

"What an escape!" he cried, "not a scratch—not a kick!"

"But he has fainted," said the lady.

"Only from fear. Let us place him against the bank; and, since madame is in haste, let us go on."

"Impossible. I would not leave any creature in such a state."

"Pooh! it's nothing, madame; he will soon recover."

"No, no!—poor fellow! he is some runaway lad from college, and has undertaken a journey beyond his strength. See how pale he is; he might die. No; I will not leave him. Lift him into the carriage, on the front seat."

The postilion obeyed—the lady got in—Gilbert was laid lengthways on a good cushion, his head supported by the well-stuffed side of the carriage.

"And now," cried the lady, "we have lost ten minutes—a crown if you make up for them."

The postilion cracked his whip above his head; the horses knew what this threatened, and set off at a gallop.

CHAPTER XX.

GILBERT RECOVERS THE LOSS OF HIS CROWN.

WHEN Gilbert returned to consciousness, he was in no small degree surprised to find himself placed as he was, with a young lady watching him anxiously.

This young lady was about five-and-twenty, with large grey eyes, a nose slightly *retroussé*, cheeks embrowned by a southern sun, and a delicately formed little mouth, which added to the naturally cheerful and laughing expression of her face something of circumspection and finesse. Her neck and arms, which were beautifully formed, were displayed to advantage by a closely-fitting bodice of violet-coloured velvet with golden buttons, while the skirt of her dress of grey silk was so enormously wide as to fill almost the entire carriage.

Gilbert continued for some time to gaze on this face, which looked on his smilingly and with much interest, and he could scarcely persuade himself that he was not in a dream.

"Well, my poor fellow," said the lady, "are you not better now?"

"Where am I?" asked he, languidly.

"You are in safety now, my little fellow," replied the lady, who spoke with a strong southern accent; "but just now you were in great danger of being crushed under the wheels of my carriage. What could have happened to you, to make you fall in that manner just in the middle of the highway?"

"I was overcome by weakness, madame, from having walked too much."

"Then you have been some time on the road?"

"Since yesterday, at four in the afternoon."

"And how far have you walked?"

"I think about eighteen leagues."

"What! in fourteen hours?"

"Oh, I ran all the way!"

"Where are you going, then?"

"To Versailles."

"And you came from——"

"From Taverney."

"Taverney! Where is that?"

"It is a château, situated between Pierrefitte and Bar-le-Duc.

"But you have scarcely had time to eat on the way?"

"I not only had not time, but I had not the means."

"How so?"

"I lost my money on the way."

"So that since yesterday you have eaten nothing?"

"Only a few mouthfuls of bread, which I brought with me."

"Poor fellow! but why did you not beg something?"

"Because I am proud, madame," said he, smiling scornfully.

"Proud! It is all very fine to be proud; but when one is dying of hunger——"

"Better death than dishonour."

The lady looked at the sententious speaker with something like admiration.

"But who are you, my friend," said she, "who speak in this style?"

"I am an orphan."

"What is your name?"

"Gilbert."

"Gilbert what?"

"Gilbert nothing."

"Ah!" said the lady, still more surprised.

Gilbert felt that he had produced an effect, and felt as if he were another Rousseau.

"You are very young to wander about in this way," continued the lady.

I was left, deserted and alone, in an old château, which the family had abandoned. I did as they had done—I abandoned it in my turn."

"Without any object in view?"

"The world is wide; there is room for all."

"And you lost your purse? Was it well filled?"

"There was only one crown in it," said he, divided between the shame of confessing his poverty and the fear of naming a large sum, which might have excited the suspicion that it had not been fairly obtained.

"One crown for such a journey! Why, it would scarcely have been sufficient to purchase bread for two days; and the distance! good heavens! from Bar-le-Duc to Paris is nearly sixty-five leagues!"

"I never counted the leagues, madame; I only said, I must get to Paris."

"And, thereupon, you set out, my poor simpleton?"

"Oh, I have good legs!"

"Good as they are, they failed, you see."

"Oh! it was not my legs—it was hope which failed me."

"Why, indeed, you looked before you fell as if in great despair."

Gilbert smiled bitterly.

"What was passing in your mind? You struck your forehead with your clenched hand, and tore out your hair by handsful."

"Indeed, madame?" asked Gilbert, rather embarrassed.

"Oh! I am certain of it; and it was that, I think, which prevented you hearing or seeing the carriage."

Gilbert's instinct told him that he might increase his consequence, and still more awaken the interest of the lady by telling the whole truth.

"I was, indeed, in despair," said he.

"And about what?" said the lady.

"Because I could not keep up with a carriage which I was following."

"Indeed," said the young lady, smiling, "this is quite a romance. Is there love in the case?"

All Gilbert's resolution could not prevent himself from blushing.

"And what carriage was it, my little Roman?"

"A carriage in the train of the dauphiness."

"What do you tell me! Is the dauphiness before us?"

"She is, indeed."

"I thought her scarcely yet at Nancy. Are no honours paid her on the way, that she advances so rapidly?"

"Oh yes, madame; but her royal highness seems to have some reason for being in haste."

"In haste? Who told you so?"

"I guessed it."

"On what grounds?"

"Why, she said at first she would stay two or three hours at Taverney, and she only stayed three-quarters of an hour."

"Do you know if she received any letters from Paris?"

"I saw a gentleman in a dress covered with embroidery, who had one in his hand as he entered."

"Did you hear his name mentioned?"

"No; I merely know that he is the governor of Strasbourg."

"What! the Count de Stainville, brother-in-law to the Duke de Choiseul! Horrible! Faster, postilion, faster!"

A vigorous lash was the reply, and Gilbert felt the speed of the carriage increase.

"But she must stop to breakfast," said the lady, as if speaking to herself, "and then we shall pass her. Postilion, what is the next town?"

"Vitry, madame."

"How far are we from it?"

"Three leagues."

"Where shall we change horses?"

"At Vauclère."

"Well, drive on, and if you see a train of carriages on the road before us, let me know."

Whilst the lady was exchanging these words with the postilion, Gilbert had again nearly fainted. When she once more turned towards him, he was pale, and his eyes were closed.

"Poor child!" said she, "he is fainting again. It is my fault; I made him talk when he was dying of hunger, instead of giving him something to eat."

She took from the pocket of the carriage a richly-carved flask, with a little silver goblet hanging round its neck by a chain, and poured out some of the contents for Gilbert. On this occasion he did not require to be asked twice.

"Now," said the lady, "eat a biscuit; in an hour or so you shall breakfast more solidly."

"Thank you, madame," said Gilbert, gladly taking the biscuit, as he had done the wine.

"As you have now recovered a little strength," said she, "tell me, if you are disposed to make a confidant of me, what induced you to follow a carriage in the train of the dauphiness?"

"Well, madame, you shall hear the truth. I was living with the Baron de Taverney when her royal highness came. She commanded him to follow her to Paris; he obeyed. I was an orphan, and consequently nobody thought of me; they left me there, without food and without money. So I resolved, since everybody was going to Versailles, with the assistance of good horses and fine coaches, I, with the assistance of only my legs, would go to Versailles, and as soon as the horses. But fate was against me! If I had not lost my money, I should have had something to eat last night; and if I had eaten last night, I should have overtaken them this morning."

"Very well. You showed courage, and I like that; but you forgot that at Versailles people cannot live on courage alone."

"I shall go to Paris."

"But in that respect Paris resembles Versailles exceedingly."

"If courage will not support me, labour will!"

"A good answer, my little fellow! But what sort of labour? Your hands do not seem those of a workman or porter."

"I shall study."

"I think you seem to know a great deal already."

"Yes, for I know that I know nothing!" replied Gilbert, remembering the aphorism of Socrates.

"And may I ask, my young friend, what branch of study you would choose?"

"I think, madame, that the best is that which teaches man to be most useful to his fellows. Besides, man is so frail a being, that he should learn the cause of his weakness, in order that he may know his strength. I should like to know, some day, why my stomach prevented my legs from carrying me any farther this morning; and if it was not that weakness

of my stomach which summoned up the phantoms which distressed my brain."

"Really, you would make an excellent physician; and you speak already most learnedly on the science of medicine. In ten years you shall have me for a patient."

"I shall try to deserve that honour, madame."

They had now reached the place where they were to change horses. The young lady asked for information respecting the dauphiness, and found that she had passed through that place a quarter of an hour before; she intended to stop at Vitry, to change horses and to breakfast.

A fresh postilion took the place of the former one. The lady allowed him to leave the village at the usual speed; but when they had got a little beyond the last house—

"Postilion," said she, "will you undertake to come up with the carriages of the dauphiness?"

"Certainly, madame."

"Before they reach Vitry?"

"Diable! they are going full trot."

"Yes; but if you were to go at a gallop?"

The postilion looked at her.

"Treble pay," said she.

"If you had said so at first," replied he, "we should have been a quarter of a league farther by this time."

"Well, here is a crown on account; make up for lost time."

The postilion's arm was stretched back, the lady's forward, and their hands met. The horses received a sharp lash, and the carriage started off like the wind.

During the change of horses, Gilbert had alighted and washed his face and hands at a fountain, had smoothed down his hair, which was very thick, and had altogether improved his appearance very much.

"In truth," said the lady to herself, "he is handsome enough for a physician;" and she smiled.

Having finished her dialogue with the postilion, she turned once more to Gilbert, whose paradoxes and sententious humour amused her exceedingly. From time to time she interrupted herself in a burst of laughter, which his philosophising caused her, to lean out of the carriage and look anxiously before her. They had gone about a league in this way, when she uttered a cry of joy—she had caught a sight of the last wagons of the dauphiness's train as they were slowly ascending a steep hill, and now there appeared in advance of them about twenty carriages, from which many of the travellers had got out and were walking beside them. Gilbert slipped out his head also, desirous to catch a glimpse of Mademoiselle de Taverney in the midst of the crowd of pigmies, and thought he discovered Nicole by her high cap.

"And now, madame," said the postilion, "what must we do?"

"We must get before them."

"Get before them! But you know we cannot pass the carriage of the dauphiness."

"Why not?"

"Because it is expressly forbidden. Peste! pass the king's horses! I should be sent to the galleys."

"Now listen, my good fellow; manage it as you please, but I must positively get before those carriages."

"I thought you belonged to the train of her royal highness?" said Gilbert, inquiringly.

"It is very proper to wish for information," replied she, "but we should not ask indiscreet questions."

"I beg your pardon, madame," said he, reddening.

"Well, postilion, what are we to do?"

"Why, faith! this—keep behind till we reach Vitry, and then, if her highness stops, obtain her permission to go on before her."

"Ay; but then it would be asked who I was—I should have to tell. No, no, that will not do; we must find out some other way."

"Madame," said Gilbert, "if I might give an opinion——"

"Yes, yes, my young friend; if you have any good advice, give it."

"Could we not take some by-road which would bring us round to Vitry, and so get before the dauphiness without having been wanting in respect to her?"

"Excellent! The boy is right!" cried the young lady. "Postilion, is there a by-road?"

"To go where?"

"Where you like, provided you leave the dauphiness behind."

"There is, in fact, a by-road leading round Vitry, and joining the high road again at Lachaussée."

"That is it! that is the very thing!" cried the lady.

"But, madame, if I take that road, you must double the pay"

"Two louis-d'ors for you, if we get to Lachaussée before the dauphiness."

"Madame is not afraid, then, of her carriage being broken?"

"I care for nothing! If it breaks, I shall proceed on horseback."

And, turning to the right, they entered a cross-road full of deep ruts, bordered by a little river, which falls into the Marne between Lachaussée and Martigny.

The postilion kept his word: he did all that human powers could do to break the carriage, but, at the same time, to arrive before the dauphiness. A dozen times Gilbert was thrown into the lady's arms, and a dozen times she into his. Intimacy springs up quickly from jolting on in the loneliness of a carriage; and, after two hours' travelling on this by-road, it seemed to Gilbert as if he had known his companion ten years, and she, on her part, would have sworn she had known him since his birth. About eleven o'clock they came again on the high road between Vitry and Chalons. A courier whom they met told them that the dauphiness was not only staying to breakfast at Vitry, but that she meant to take two hours' repose. He added that he had been sent forward to desire those who attended to the horses to have them in readiness between three and four o'clock. This news filled the lady with joy. She gave the postilion the two louis-d'ors which she promised him; and, turning to Gilbert, "So now," said she, "we shall be able to dine at the next stopping-place!"

But fate had decided that Gilbert should not dine there.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH A NEW PERSONAGE MAKES HIS APPEARANCE.

FROM the top of the hill which the lady's carriage was ascending, the village of Lachaussée might be seen: it was there she was to change horses and stop to dine. It was a lovely little village, with its thatched cottages scattered here and there at the caprice of the owners; some in

the very middle of the road, some half hidden under the shade of a little grove which bordered the highway, and some following the course of the little river which we have mentioned, over which the inhabitants had placed temporary and rustic bridges to reach their dwellings.

At that moment, however, the most remarkable feature in the village was a man, who, looking down the brook, was standing right in the middle of the road, as if he had been ordered to keep watch there. Sometimes he looked up, sometimes down the road; then he turned a longing eye towards a beautiful grey horse with long mane and tail, which was fastened to the window-shutter of a cabin, which he shook in his impatient tossing of his head—an impatience which was the more excusable, as, from the fact of his being saddled, it might be presumed he was waiting for his master, who was inside.

From time to time the stranger ventured to approach the horse to pat his side, or pass his hand down his slender legs; and then, when he luckily escaped the kick which was always vouchsafed him at each attempt, he returned to his occupation of watching the road. Wearied at last by this fruitless watching, he knocked on the window shutter.

"Hallo! In there!" he shouted.

"Who is there?" replied a man's voice—and the shutter was opened.

"Sir," said the stranger, "if your horse is to be sold, the buyer is here at hand."

"You can see he has no wisp at his tail," answered the other, who appeared to be a countryman; and he shut the window.

This answer did not appear to satisfy the stranger, so he knocked again. He was a tall, stout man, with a ruddy complexion, a black beard, and large sinewy hands peeping out from fine lace ruffles. He wore a hat edged with gold lace, and set on crosswise, like those officers of the provinces who try to look fierce in the eyes of the poor Parisians. He knocked a third time—but no answer. He got impatient.

"Do you know, my honest fellow," cried he, "you are not very polite? and if you don't open your shutter, I'll break it in!"

At this threat the shutter opened, and the same face as before appeared.

"But when you were told the horse is not for sale," replied the peasant, for the second time, "what the devil—is not that enough?"

"But when I tell you that I want a fast animal!"

"Well, if you want one, can you not go to the post-house? there are sixty of the king's there; you surely can choose from among them. But leave a man who has only one that one!"

"I tell you this is the very one I want!"

"A nice proposal, indeed! An Arabian——"

"That is the reason I want it."

"Very possibly—but it is not for sale."

"Whose is it?"

"You are very curious!"

"And you mighty discreet!"

"Well, it belongs to a person asleep in the house."

"A man or a woman?"

"A woman."

"Tell the woman, then, that I will give her five hundred pistoles for her horse."

"Oh! ho!" said the peasant, staring; "five hundred pistoles! That is a sum!"

"Tell her it is the king who wants her horse."

"The king?"

"Yes, in person!"

"Oh, come! you are not the king, are you?"

"No—but I represent him."

"You represent him?" said the peasant, taking off his hat.

"Come, come! make haste! The king is in a hurry!" and the burly stranger cast another impatient glance towards the highway.

"Well, when the lady awakes I will tell her."

"Yes, but I can't wait till she wakes."

"What is to be done then?"

"Parbleu! awaken her!"

"Awaken her? certainly not."

"Well, I shall do it myself!"

But just as the stranger who pretended to be the representative of his majesty advanced to knock at the window of the upper story with the handle of his long whip, he caught a glimpse of a carriage coming along at the utmost speed of the worn-out horses. His quick eye recognised it instantly, and he sprang forward to meet it—it was that in which were Gilbert and his guardian angel. On seeing this man, who made signs to him to stop, the postilion gladly obeyed, for he scarcely knew whether the horses could take him to the post-house.

"Chon! my dear Chon! is it you at last?"

"It is, Jean," replied the lady addressed by this singular name. "And what are you doing here?"

"Pardieu, a pretty question! I am waiting for you."

And he leaped on the step of the carriage, and putting in his long arms, seized her and covered her with kisses.

"Ha!" said he, all at once observing Gilbert, who looked on with surprise at these strange proceedings. "What the deuce have you here?"

"Oh, a little philosopher, and very amusing," replied Mademoiselle Chon, little caring whether she hurt or flattered the pride of her new acquaintance.

"And where did you pick him up?"

"On the road: but that is not the question."

"True," said the person who was called Jean. "What about our old Countess de Bearn?"

"All settled!"

"What! settled!"

"Yes, she will come."

"But what did you say to her?"

"That I was her lawyer's daughter—that I was passing through Verdun, and that my father desired me to tell her her lawsuit was coming on. I merely added that her presence in Paris had now become indispensable for its success."

"What did she say to that?"

"She opened her little grey eyes—took a long pinch of snuff—said that Monsieur Flageot was the cleverest man in the world, and—gave orders for her departure!"

"Admirable, Chon! I shall make you my ambassador extraordinary. And now, shall we breakfast?"

"With all my heart! for this poor child is dying of hunger. But we must be quick, for she will soon overtake us."

"Who? the old countess? Nonsense."

"No—the dauphiness."

"Bah! The dauphiness is scarcely at Nancy yet."

"She is at Vitry! three leagues off!"

"Peste! That alters the case! Drive on! drive on! postilion!"

"Where, sir?"

"To the post-house."

The carriage drove off, with the stranger still standing on the step, and soon drew up before the inn door.

"Quick! quick!" said Chon. "Let us have some cutlets—a fowl—some eggs—and a bottle of Burgundy. We must set out again instantly."

"Excuse me, madame," said the innkeeper, stepping forward, "but in that case it must be with your own horses."

"How!" said Jean, leaping heavily down from the step of the carriage. "With our own horses?"

"Certainly: or at least with those that brought you."

"Impossible!" said the postilion; "they have already done a double stage. See what a state they are in!"

"In good earnest," said Chon, "it would be utterly impossible to proceed farther with them."

"But what prevents your giving us fresh horses?" asked Jean.

"Merely that I have none."

"What the devil! you know the regulations—it is your duty to have horses."

"By the regulations, sir, I ought to have fifteen horses; now, I have eighteen."

"Why, all we want is three!"

"Yes, but they are all out."

"What! all the eighteen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Damnation!" thundered the traveller.

"Oh, viscount! viscount!" cried Chon.

"Yes, yes, Chon—don't be afraid—I will keep calm. And when will your miserable hacks be in?" continued the viscount, turning to the host.

"Faith, sir, I don't know—it all depends on the postilions. Perhaps in an hour—perhaps in two hours."

"Now, my good fellow," said Viscount Jean, placing his hat on one side, and setting out his right leg, "I wish you just to understand this—I never jest!"

"I am sorry for it, sir. I should like you much better if you did."

"Now, take my advice! Let the horses be harnessed before I get angry!"

"Go into the stable yourself, sir; and if you find a horse there, you shall have it for nothing."

"Indeed!—and what if I should find sixty?"

"It would be just the same as if there were none; for these sixty horses are the king's."

"Well, what then?"

"What then!—they are not to be hired out!"

"What the devil are they here for, then?"

"For the use of her royal highness the dauphiness!"

"Mon Dieu! sixty horses, and we cannot get one."

"But you know, sir——"

"I know one thing, and that is, that I am in a hurry——"

"It is a pity."

"And," continued the viscount, without heeding the postmaster's interruption, "as the dauphiness will not be here before the evening——"

"What do you say?" exclaimed the host, all alarmed.

"I say that the horses will be back before she arrives!"

"Can it be possible you would propose?——"

"Parbleu!" said the viscount, going into the stable, "I will have three horses; I don't want eight, like royal personages, although I have a right to them—by alliance at least."

"But I say you shall not have one!" said the host, throwing himself, in desperation, between the stranger and his horses.

"Scoundrel!" cried the viscount, turning pale with anger, "do you know who I am?"

"Viscount, viscount, in Heaven's name, no broils!" cried Chon.

"You are right, my good little Chon;" then, after a moment's thought, he turned with his most charming smile to the host: "My good fellow, no more words, now for deeds! I shall take the responsibility off your shoulders."

"How so?" asked the host, by no means satisfied even with the stranger's now gracious visage.

"I shall help myself; these three horses suit me exactly."

"And you call that freeing me from all responsibility?"

"Certainly; you have not given them to me—it was I who took them."

"I tell you the thing is impossible!"

"We shall see that. Where is the harness?"

"Let no one stir, at his peril!" cried the host to two or three grooms loitering about.

"Scoundrels!" cried the viscount.

"Jean, my dear Jean!" exclaimed Chon, "you will only bring us into some disagreeable situation. When on a mission like this we must endure——"

"Everything except delay," said Jean, with the utmost coolness; "and, since these rogues won't help me, I shall do the business myself." And Jean coolly took from the wall three sets of harness, and fitted them on three of the horses.

"Jean, Jean, I entreat you, do not be rash!" cried Chon, clasping her hands.

"Do you wish to arrive in Paris or not?" said the viscount, grinding his teeth.

"Of course I do. All is lost if we do not hasten on!"

"Well, then, leave me alone." And, separating three horses—not the worst—from the others, he led them to the carriage.

"Take care, sir, take care!" cried the host; "it is high treason to steal those horses!"

"I am not going to steal them, you fool; I'm only going to borrow them. Come on, my little pets!"

The host sprang forward to catch the reins; but before he could touch them, he was rudely repulsed by the stranger.

"Brother, brother!" cried Mademoiselle Chon.

"Ah! he is her brother!" muttered Gilbert to himself, breathing more freely.

At this moment a window was opened on the opposite side of the way, and a lovely female face was seen. She appeared quite alarmed at the noise.

"Oh, it is you, madame?" cried Jean, who immediately perceived her.

"How, sir—me?" she replied, in bad French.

"Yes; you are awake now. Will you sell your horse?"

"My horse?"

"Yes, the grey Arabian, tied to the window-shutter there. You know I offered you five hundred crowns!"

"My horse is not for sale, sir," said she, shutting the window.

"Well, I am not in luck to-day—people will neither sell nor hire; but, corbleu! I'll take the Arabian if she won't sell it; and I'll drive these hacks to the devil, if they won't hire them. Come, Patrice!"

The footman on his sister's carriage jumped down.

"Harness them!" said Jean.

"Help! help!" shouted the host.

Two grooms ran forward.

"Jean!—viscount!" cried poor Chon, writhing in the carriage, and endeavouring in vain to open the door. "You are mad:—we shall all be slaughtered!"

"Slaughtered! It is we who shall slaughter them, I hope. We are three against three! Come out, my young philosopher!" thundered Jean, addressing Gilbert, who never stirred, so great was his astonishment; "come out, and do something—sticks, stones, or fists—anything will do! Morbleu! you look like a saint carved on stone!"

Gilbert gave an inquiring and supplicating glance at his protectress, but she held him by the arm. The host, in the meantime, bawled incessantly, dragging the horses to one side, whilst Jean pulled them to the other. But the struggle could not last for ever. Jean, wearied and heated, dealt the defender of the horses such a blow with his clenched fist, that the latter fell back into the horse-pond, among his frightened ducks and geese, shouting, as he plunged in, "Help! murder! murder!"

The viscount, thus rid of his adversary, lost no time in harnessing the horses.

"Help, in the name of the king! Help!" cried the host, rising and endeavouring to rally his frightened grooms.

"Who calls for help in the name of the king?" cried a cavalier, riding at full speed into the yard of the post-house, and reining up his horse, bathed in sweat and foam, in the very midst of the actors in this tumultuous scene.

"The Chevalier Philip de Taverney!" muttered Gilbert to himself, sinking down in the carriage to escape observation.

Chon, who lost no opportunity of acquiring information, heard the young man's name.

CHAPTER XXII.

VISCOUNT JEAN.

THE young lieutenant of the body-guard of the dauphin—for it was he—leaped from his horse at the aspect of this strange scene, which began to collect about the post-house all the women and children of the village. On seeing Philip, the post-master was ready to throw himself on his knees before his protector, whom Providence had sent him so opportunely.

'Sir, sir!" cried he, "do you know that this person is about to take by force some of the horses of her royal highness the dauphiness?"

Philip drew back, as if he heard what was absolutely incredible. "And who has made this attempt?" he inquired.

"I, sir!—mordieu!—I, myself!" said Jean.

"It cannot be, sir; otherwise you are either mad or not a gentleman!"

"Excuse me, sir. I am in my perfect senses, and have the entrée at court."

"How!—You are in your perfect senses, and are received at court, and yet you dare to take the horses of the dauphiness?"

"In the first place, there are sixty horses—her royal highness can only employ eight—and it would be strange, indeed, if I should unluckily pitch upon the very ones she wanted."

"True, sir—there are sixty horses," replied the young man, "and her royal highness will only employ eight; but that does not hinder every horse, from the first to the sixtieth, being for her service; and between these horses no distinction can be made."

"You are mistaken, sir—it is made!" said the viscount, contemptuously, "since I have taken these three for myself. Shall I go on foot, when rascally lackeys are drawn by four horses? Mordieu! let them be satisfied, as I am, with three, and there will be enough for us all."

"If the lackeys have four horses, sir, it is by the king's order, and now have the goodness to order your footman to take those horses back to the stable." These words Philip pronounced firmly, but with so much politeness that none but a ruffian would have answered otherwise than respectfully.

"You may be right, my dear lieutenant," answered Jean, "to speak in this manner, if it be a part of your duty to attend to the cattle; but I did not know that the gentlemen of the dauphin's body-guard had been raised to the rank of grooms. Therefore, take my advice, shut your eyes—tell your people to do the same—and—a good day to you!"

"Sir, whether I have been raised or lowered to the rank of groom is not the question—what I do is my duty, and I am commanded by the dauphiness herself to attend to the relays."

"Oh, that alters the case; but allow me to tell you that you are filling a sorry office, Mr. Lieutenant, and if this is the way the young lady begins to treat the army——"

"Of whom do you speak, sir?" interrupted Philip.

"Why, parbleu! of the Austrian."

The chevalier turned as pale as death. "Do you dare," he exclaimed, "to speak——"

"I not only dare to speak," interrupted Jean, "but I dare to act!—Come, Patrice—hasten, we are pressed for time."

Philip seized the first horse by the bridle. "Sir," said he, in a perfectly calm voice, "do me the favour to give your name."

"Do you wish particularly to know it?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, I am the Viscount Jean Dubarry."

"What!—you are the brother of her——"

"Who will send you to rot in the Bastille, if you say one word more;" and Jean jumped into the carriage.

Philip approached the door. "Viscount Jean Dubarry," said he, "you will do me the honour to come out."

"Yes, ma foi! I have a great deal of time for that!" said the viscount, endeavouring to shut the door.

"If you hesitate one instant, sir," replied Philip, preventing him with his left hand from closing the carriage door, "I give you my word of honour I will run you through the body!" and, as he spoke, he drew his sword.

"Oh!" cried Chon, "we shall be murdered. Give up the horses, Jean—give them up!"

"What! you threaten me," shouted Jean, grinding his teeth and snatching up his sword, which he had laid on the seat of the carriage before him.

"And the threat shall be followed up—do you hear?—in a moment," and the young man's sword glanced before Jean's eyes.

"We shall never get away," whispered Chon, "if you do not manage this officer by gentle means."

"Neither gentleness nor violence shall stop me in the discharge of my duty," said Philip, who had overheard the advice, bowing; "I recommend you, madame, to advise Monsieur le Viscount to submit in time, or in the name of the king, whom I represent, I shall be forced to kill him if he resist, or to arrest him if he do not."

"And I tell you I shall have the horses in spite of you!" shouted Jean, leaping out of the carriage and drawing his sword.

"That remains to be proved, sir,' said Philip, putting himself on his guard; "are you ready?"

"Lieutenant," said the brigadier commanding under Philip, "there are six of our men near—shall I——?"

"Do not stir!—Do not stir!—this is a personal quarrel. Now, sir, I am at your service."

Mademoiselle Chon shrieked, and Gilbert wished the carriage had been as deep as a well, to hide him.

Jean began the attack; he was a good swordsman, but anger prevented him from turning his skill to advantage. Philip, on the contrary, was as cool as if he had been playing with a foil in the fencing-school. The viscount advanced, retired, leaped to the right, to the left, shouting in making his passes like the fencing-master of a regiment: while the chevalier, with closed teeth and steady eye, immovable as a statue, watched all his adversary's movements, and divined his intentions. Every one in the yard was silent, attentively looking on; even Chon ceased to scream. For some minutes the combat continued without Jean's feints, shouts, and movements producing any effect, but also without his having permitted Philip, who was studying his opponent's play, to touch him once. All at once, however, the viscount sprung back, uttering a cry of pain, and at the same moment his ruffles were stained with blood, which ran down his fingers in large drops—he was wounded in the arm.

"You are wounded, sir," said Philip.

"Sacrebleu, I feel it well enough," said he, turning pale and letting his sword fall.

The chevalier took it up and restored it to him: "Take it, sir," said he, "and never again be guilty of a similar folly."

"Plague take it!—if I have my follies, I pay for them," growled the viscount. "Come and dress this scrape, dear Chon," added he to his sister, who sprung from the carriage and hastened to his assistance.

"You will do me the justice, madame," said Philip, "to acknowledge that all this has not been caused by my fault. I deeply regret having been driven to such extremities before a lady," and bowing, he retired. "Let those horses be unharnessed and taken back to the stable," said he to the post-master.

Jean shook his fist at him.

"Oh!" cried the host, "this is just in the nick of time: three horses coming in that have been out! Courtin, Courtin!—quick! put them to the gentleman's carriage."

"But, master——" said the postilion.

"Come, come! no reply: the gentleman is in a hurry. Don't be uneasy, sir, you shall have the horses."

"All very fine: but your horses should have been here half-an-hour ago," growled Dubarry, stamping with his foot, as he looked at his arm, pierced through and through, which Chon was binding up with her handkerchief.

Meantime Philip had mounted his horse again, and was giving his orders as if nothing had occurred.

"Now, brother, now! let us go," said Chon, leading him towards the carriage.

"And my Arabian?" said he. "Ah, ma foi! let him go to the devil, for I am in for a day of ill-luck," and he got into the carriage.

"Oh," said he, perceiving Gilbert, "I cannot stretch my legs with this fellow."

"Let me out, pray," said Gilbert, "and I will walk."

"In the devil's name go, then," replied Jean.

"No, no," said Chon, "I must keep my little philosopher—sit opposite me, and you will not annoy him;" and she held Gilbert by the arm: then, bending forward, she whispered to her brother, "He knows the man who wounded you."

A gleam of joy flashed from the viscount's eyes: "Oh, very well!—let him stay—what is the fellow called?"

"The Chevalier Philip de Taverney."

Just then the young officer passed the carriage.

"Oh, you are there, my little gendarme," shouted the viscount; "you look wonderfully fierce just now, but my turn will come some day."

"I shall be at your service, sir, whenever you please," answered Philip, calmly.

"Yes, yes, we shall see that, Monsieur Philip de Taverney," said the viscount, leaning forward to see what effect the mention of his name would have on the young man, when he must be so far from expecting to hear it.

Philip looked up with surprise, and indeed with a slight feeling of uneasiness, but immediately recovering his self-possession, and taking off his hat, with the utmost grace, "A pleasant journey, Viscount Jean Dubarry," said he.

The carriage rolled on rapidly. "Thousand devils!" said the viscount, making a horrible grimace; "do you know, my little Chon, I am suffering dreadful pain?"

"The first place where we change I shall send for a doctor for you, while this poor fellow breakfasts," replied Chon.

"Ah! true, true, we have not breakfasted, but the pain I suffer—and I am in agony with thirst—takes away all appetite."

"Will you drink a glass of wine from my flask?"

"Certainly?—give it me."

"Sir," said Gilbert, "will you allow me to remark, that wine is very bad for you in your present condition."

"Really you are quite a physician, my little philosopher!"

"No, sir—but I hope to be so one day. I have read, however, in a treatise written for people in the army, that the first things forbidden the wounded are spirits, wine, and coffee."

"Ah, you read that!—well, I shall not drink the wine."

"But if Monsieur le Viscount would permit me to take his handkerchief and dip it in that brook, and then wrap it round his arm, I am sure it would ease his pain."

"Do, do!" said Chon; "stop, postilion!"

Gilbert got out to follow up his proposition. "This boy will be a horrid plague to us," said the viscount, "I have a great mind to tell the postilion to drive on and leave him there, handkerchief and all."

"You would be wrong—that boy can be very useful to us."

"How so?"

"He has already given me some important information about the dauphiness—and did he not just now tell you the name of your adversary?"

"True!—well, let him stay."

Gilbert returned, and the application of the wet bandage to the viscount's arm, as he had foretold, relieved him greatly.

"Faith, he was right—I feel much better," said he, "let us have a little chat." Gilbert opened his ears to their utmost extent. The conversation which ensued, and which was conducted in the lively and brilliant patois of Provence, would have sadly puzzled a Parisian ear, and Gilbert, master of himself as he was, could not avoid a slight movement of impatience, which Mademoiselle Chon having perceived, quieted with a gentle smile. This smile reminded the poor boy of the kindness with which he was treated. Circumstances had brought him in contact with a nobleman honoured with the royal favour. "Ah," thought he, "if Andrée saw me in this magnificent carriage!"—and his heart swelled with pride. New ideas and hopes took possession of him, and Nicole no longer cost him a thought.

In the meantime, the brother and sister resumed their conversation, still however in the Provençal dialect.

Suddenly the viscount leaned forward, "See, there he is!" cried he.

"What?"

"The Arabian which I wished to buy."

"Oh!" exclaimed Chon, "what a splendid woman the rider is!"

"Call her, Chon, she will not perhaps be so much afraid of you—I would give a thousand crowns for the horse."

"And how much for the woman?" said Chon, laughing.

"I would give all I have for her—but call her."

"Madame!" cried Chon, "madame!"

But the stranger appeared not to hear, or not to understand. Wrapped in a long white mantle, and her face shaded by a large beaver hat with drooping feathers, she flew past them like an arrow, crying: "*Avanti, Djerid, avanti!*"

"She is an Italian," said the viscount. "Mordieu, what a splendid woman!—if it were not for the pain of my arm, I would jump out and run after her."

"I know her," said Gilbert.

"Why, the little fellow is a directory for the whole province; "he knows every one."

"Who is she?" asked Chon.

"Her name is Lorenza, and she is the sorcerer's wife."

"What sorcerer?"

"The Baron Joseph Balsamo."

The brother and sister looked at each other with an expression which said, "We did well to keep him!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COUNTESS DU BARRY'S MORNING LEVEE.

WHILST Mademoiselle Chon and Viscount Jean are travelling post on the Chalons road, let us introduce the reader to another member of the same family.

In the suite of rooms at Versailles which the Princess Adelaide, daughter of Louis XV. had once occupied, his majesty had installed his mistress, the Countess Dubarry, not without keenly studying beforehand the effect which this piece of policy would produce on his court. The favourite, with her merry whims and her careless joyous humour, had transformed that wing of the palace, formerly so quiet, into a scene of perpetual merriment and tumult, and every hour she issued thence her commands for a banquet or a party of pleasure.

But what appeared still more unusual on these magnificent staircases, was the never-ceasing stream of visitors ascending them, and crowding an antechamber filled with curiosities from all parts of the globe—certainly containing nothing so curious as the idol worshipped by this crowd.

The day after that on which the scene which we have just described occurred at the little village of Lachaussée, about nine in the morning, the countess, lovely as an eastern Houri, was at the important duties of the toilet.

"No news of Chon?" asked one of her tiring-women.

"No, madame."

"Nor of the viscount?"

"No, madame."

"Do you know has Bischi received any?"

"A message was sent to your sister's, madame, this morning, but there were no letters."

"It is very tiresome waiting in this way," said the countess, pouting her lovely mouth: "I am in a wretched humour—I pity all who may come near me to day. Will some means never be invented of conversing at a hundred leagues' distance? Is my antechamber passably filled this morning?"

"Can madame think it necessary to ask?"

"Dame! but listen! Dorée—the dauphiness is coming!—I shall be abandoned for that sun, I, who am only a little twinkling star—but tell me, who is there this morning?"

"The Duke d'Aiguillon, madame, the Prince de Soubise, Monsieur de Sartines, the President Maupeou,——"

"And the Duke de Richelieu?"

"Not yet, madam."

"How?—neither to-day nor yesterday?—He is afraid of compromising himself—you must send one of my servants to the Hôtel du Hanovre to inquire if the duke be ill."

"Yes, madame; will you receive all who are waiting at once, or do you wish to give any one a private audience?"

"Monsieur de Sartines first—I must speak to him alone."

The order was transmitted by the countess's woman to a tall footman who waited in the corridor leading from her bed-chamber to the anterooms, and the minister of police immediately appeared, dressed in black,

and endeavouring by an insinuating smile to moderate the severe expression of his grey eyes and thin lips.

"Good morning, my dear enemy!" said the countess, without looking round, but seeing him in the mirror before her.

"Your enemy, madame!"

"Yes; my world is divided into only two classes—friends and enemies—I admit no neutrals, or class them as enemies."

"And you are right, madame; but tell me how I, notwithstanding my well-known devotion to your interests, deserve to be included in either one or other of these classes?"

"By allowing to be printed, distributed, sold, and sent to the king, a whole ocean of pamphlets, libels, verses—all against me. It is ill-natured—stupid—odious!"

"But, madame, I am not responsible."

"Yes, sir, you are; for you know the wretch who wrote them."

"Madame, if they were all written by one author, we should not have the trouble of sending him to the Bastille—Hercules himself would sink under such a labour!'

"Upon my word, you are highly complimentary to me."

"If I were your enemy, madame, I should not speak the truth thus."

"Well, I believe you!—we understand each other now. But one thing still gives me some uneasiness."

"What is that, madame."

"You are on good terms with the Choiseuls."

"Madame, M. de Choiseul is prime minister; he issues his orders and I must obey them."

"So if Monsieur de Choiseul orders that I am to be vexed, tortured, worried to death, you will allow me to be vexed, tortured, worried!—Thank you!"

"Let us discuss matters a little," said Sartines, sitting down without being asked to do so, but without any displeasure being exhibited on the part of the favourite, for much must be pardoned in the man who knew better than any other all that was doing in France. "Let us discuss this a little—and first, what have I done for you these three days past?"

"You informed me that a courier had been sent from Chanteloup to hasten the arrival of the dauphiness."

"Was that done like an enemy?"

"But about the presentation on which you know my heart is set—what have you been doing for me?"

"Doing all I possibly could."

"Monsieur de Sartines, you are not candid!"

"Ah, madame! I assure you, you are unjust. Did I not find and bring you Viscount Jean from the back room of a tavern in less than two hours, when you wanted him in order to send him I don't know where, or rather I do know where."

"I had much rather you had allowed my brother-in-law to stay there," said Madame Dubarry, laughing, "a man allied to the royal family of France!"

"Well, but was that not a service to be added to my many other services?"

"Oh, very well!—but just tell me what you did for me yesterday."

"Yesterday, madame!"

"Oh, you may well endeavour to recollect—that was your day for obliging others."

"I don't understand you, madame."

"Well I understand myself—answer, sir, what were you doing yesterday?"

"Yesterday morning I was occupied as usual, writing with my secretary."

"Till what hour?"

"Till ten."

"What did you do then?"

"I sent to invite a friend of mine from Lyons, who had made a wager he would come to Paris without my knowing, and my footman met him just at the barrier."

"Well, after dinner?"

"I sent to the Austrian lieutenant of police information of the haunt of a famous robber whom he could not discover."

"And where is he?"

"At Vienna."

"So you are not only the Minister of Police at Paris, but perform the same duties for foreign courts?"

"Yes, madame—in my leisure moments."

"Well, I shall take a note of that. Then, after having despatched the courier to Vienna—— ?"

"I went to the opera."

"To see the little Guimard? Poor Soubise!"

"No—to arrest a famous pickpocket, whom I did not disturb so long as he kept to the fermiers-general, but who had the audacity to rob two or three noblemen."

"You should say the indiscretion. Well—after the opera——?"

"After the opera?"

"Yes. That seems to be rather a puzzling question—is it not?"

"No. After the opera? let me think——"

"So. How much your memory has failed of late."

"Oh! after the opera—yes, I remember——"

"Well?"

"I went to the house of a certain lady who keeps a gaming-table, and I myself conducted her to Fort-l'Evêque."

"In her carriage?"

"No—in a fiacre."

"Well?"

"Well, that is all."

"No, it is not!"

"I got into my fiacre again."

"And whom did you find in it?"

He reddened.

"Oh!" cried the countess, clapping her little hands, "I have really had the honour of making a minister of police blush!"

"Madame——" stammered Sartines.

"No—I shall tell you who was in the fiacre—it was the Duchess de Grammont!"

"The Duchess de Grammont?"

"Yes, the Duchess de Grammont—who came to ask you to contrive to get her admitted to the king's private apartments."

"Ma foi, madame!" said the minister, shifting uneasily in his chair, "I may give up my portfolio to you. It is you who manage the police of Paris, not I."

"To tell the truth, sir, I have a police of my own. So beware! Oh,

the Duchess de Grammont in a fiacre with the minister of police at midnight! It was capital! Do you know what I did?"

"No, but I am afraid it was something dreadful—fortunately it was very late."

"But night is the time for vengeance!"

"And what, then, did you do?"

"As I keep a police of my own, I keep a body of writers also—shocking, ragged, hungry scribblers!"

"Hungry? you must feed them badly."

"I don't feed them at all. If they became fat they would be as stupid as the Prince de Soubise: fat, we are told, absorbs the gall."

"Go on—I shudder at the thought of them."

"I recollected all the disagreeable things you have allowed the Choiseuls to do against me, and determined to be revenged. I gave my legion of famishing Apollos the following programme:—First, Monsieur de Sartines, disguised as a lawyer, visiting an innocent young girl who lives in a garret, and giving her, on the thirtieth of every month, a wretched pittance of a hundred crowns."

"Madame, that is a benevolent action which you are endeavouring to misconstrue."

"It is only such actions which can be misconstrued. My second scene was Monsieur de Sartines, disguised like a reverend missionary, introducing himself into the convent of the Carmelites of the Rue Saint Antoine."

"I was taking those good nuns some news from the Indies."

"East or West Indies—which? My third scene is Monsieur de Sartines, disguised as lieutenant of the police, driving through the streets at midnight in a fiacre with the Duchess de Grammont."

"No, madame," exclaimed he. "No—you would not bring ridicule on my administration in that manner!"

"Why, do you not bring ridicule on mine?" said the countess, laughing; "but wait! I set my rogues to work, and they began like boys at college, with exordium, narration, and amplification—and I have received this morning an epigram, a song, and a ballad, of which you are the subject."

"You are not serious?"

"Perfectly so; and to-morrow you shall receive them all three."

"Why not to-day?"

"I must have some time first to distribute them. Is not that the way? Besides, the police ought always to hear last about any new affair. I assure you, you will be very much amused! I laughed three-quarters of an hour at them this morning, and the king was nearly dead with laughing—it was that which made him so late."

"I am ruined!" cried Sartines, clasping his hands.

"Ruined? Nonsense! You are only celebrated in song. Am I ruined by all the verses made on me? No—I only get in a passion at them, and then for revenge I determine to put somebody else in a passion too. Ah, what delightful verses! I have ordered some wine to my literary scorpions, and I expect by this time their senses are wrapped up in happy oblivion."

"Ah, countess, countess!"

"But, pardieu, you must hear the epigram:

'Oh, France, how wretched is thy fate,
When women hold the helm of state.'

No, no—I am wrong; that is the scandal perpetrated against myself. But there are so many, I confound them. Listen, listen! here it is:

'A perfumer once sought of a painter a sign,
His skill than his genius was duller,
For in a huge bottle, with knavish design,
He makes Boynes, Maupeou, and Terray to shine,
Displayed in their own proper colour.
But for Sartines still room in the vessel he leaves,
And he labels the mixture the essence of thieves.'"

"Cruel woman, you will send me mad!" cried Sartines.

"Now we must look at the poem. You must know it is Madame de Grammont who speaks:

'Dear minister, you know my skin
Is to the purest snow akin;
Then grant to me this single thing—
Oh, say so, say so, to the king.'"

"Madame, madame!" cried Sartines, more furious than ever.

"Nonsense!" said the countess. "You need not be so uneasy about these little poems; I have only had ten thousand copies of them struck off."

"You have a press, then?"

"Certainly. Has not the Duke de Choiseul one?"

"Let your printer take care!"

"Oh, it is kept in my own name—I am the printer."

"Shocking, shocking! And the king laughs at these calumnies?"

"Laughs? He sometimes gives me rhymes himself, when my own inspiration fails."

"You know how I serve you, and you treat me thus?"

"I know that you are betraying me—the Duchess de Grammont wishes to ruin me."

"Madame, I declare to you she took me quite unawares!"

"You confess, then, that I was informed correctly?"

"I am forced to confess it."

"Why did you not tell me?"

"I came now for that purpose."

"I don't believe you."

"Upon my honour!"

"I bet two to one against that pledge."

"Behold me at your feet!" and he fell on his knees. "I beg forgiveness."

"You are in the position in which you ought to be."

"Let us make peace, countess, in Heaven's name!"

"So you are afraid of a few bad verses—you, a man, a minister! Yet you never reflect how many wretched hours such things make me spend—I, a poor, weak woman!"

"You are a queen."

"A queen—not presented at court!"

"I swear to you, I have never done anything hurtful to your interests!"

"No, but you have allowed others to do so. The matter, however, is now, not the doing nothing against them, but the doing all in your power to forward them. Are you on my side—yes or no?"

"Certainly, on your side."

"Will you assist me? Will you allow nothing to interpose to hinder my presentation?"

"For myself, I promise everything."

"No," said the countess, stamping with her foot, "Punic faith! I will not accept that; there is a loophole in it to creep out at! You will be supposed to do nothing against me yourself, but the Duke de Choiseul will do all. Give me up the Choiseul party, bound hand and foot, or I will annihilate you—destroy you! Take care! verses are not my only weapons!"

"Do not threaten me, madame," said Sartines, thoughtfully; "there are difficulties about this presentation which you cannot understand."

"Obstacles have purposely been thrown in the way of it. You can remove them."

"It would require a hundred persons to do so."

"You shall have a million!"

"The king will not give his consent."

"He shall give it!"

"And, when you have got it, how get a lady to present you?"

"I am seeking for one now."

"It is quite useless—there is a league against you."

"At Versailles?"

"Yes. All the ladies have refused, in order to pay their court to the Duke de Choiseul, the Duchess de Grammont, the dauphiness, and the whole prudish party."

"Do not fear; I have nearly obtained what I want."

"Ha! it was for that you sent your sister to Verdun!"

"So you know that, do you?" said she, angrily.

"Oh, I have also my police, you know!" said Sartines, laughing.

"And your spies?"

"And my spies."

"In my apartments?"

"In your apartments."

"In my stable, or in my kitchen?"

"In your antechamber—in your saloon—in your bedroom—under your pillow."

"Now, as the first pledge of our peace," said the countess, "give me the names of those spies."

"No, countess; I should not wish to embroil you with your friends."

"But name only the last who told you a secret."

"What would you do?"

"I would turn him out."

"If you begin in that way, you will soon have to live in an empty house."

"This is frightful!"

"Yet perfectly true. Oh, you know we could not govern without spies! So excellent a politician as you must have discovered that long ago."

Madame Dubarry leaned her elbow on a table, and seemed to reflect for some minutes; then she said, "You are right. Let us say no more on the subject. What are to be the conditions of our treaty?"

"Make them yourself. You are the conqueror."

"I am as magnanimous as Semiramis. Let me hear what you wish."

"Well, then, you are never to speak to the king about petitions on the subject of wheat; for, traitress! you have promised your support to those petitions."

"Very well. Take away all the petitions with you; they are in a box there."

"As a reward, here is a document drawn up by the peers of the kingdom respecting presentations, and the right of sitting in the royal presence."

"A document which you were charged to give his majesty?"

"Yes."

"But what will you say to them?"

"That I have given it. You will thus gain time; and you are too clever in your tactics not to take advantage of it."

At this moment the folding-doors were thrown open, and a negro announced, "The king!"

The two allies hastened to hide their mutual pledges of peace and good understanding, and turned to salute his majesty, Louis—the fifteenth of that name.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KING LOUIS THE FIFTEENTH.

THE king entered with head erect, with a firm step, his eye full of life, and a smile on his lips. As the doors were opened, a double file of bowing heads was seen, belonging to the courtiers, who had been long waiting in the antechamber, and who were now more desirous of admittance than ever, since they could thus pay their court to two powers at once; but the doors closed on them, for the king made a sign that no one should follow him. He found himself alone, therefore, with the countess and the minister of police (for we need not reckon the waiting-maid or the little negro boy).

"Good-morning, countess!" said the king, kissing Madame Dubarry's hand; "ha! fresh as any rose, I see! Good-morning, Sartines! Is this your cabinet, where you write your despatches? Heavens! what heaps of papers! Hide them, hide them! Ha! what a beautiful fountain, countess!"

And, with the versatile curiosity of one always in search of something to amuse him, he fixed his eyes on a large china ornament, which had been brought in since the evening before and placed in a corner of the countess's bedroom.

"Sire," replied the countess, "it is a Chinese fountain; by turning this cock, the water comes out and makes these birds sing and these fishes swim; then the doors of the pagoda open, and there comes out a procession of mandarins."

"Very pretty—very pretty indeed!"

At this moment the little negro walked across the room, dressed in the fantastic fashion in which, at this period, they dressed their Osmans and Othellos: he wore a little turban, ornamented with a lofty plume of feathers, on one side of his head; a vest embroidered with gold, which permitted his ebony arms to be seen; and slashed breeches of white brocaded satin; round his waist was a scarf of various bright colours, which connected the breeches with a richly-embroidered jacket; and a dagger, ornamented with precious stones, was stuck in the scarf bound around his waist.

"Peste!" cried the king, "how splendid Zamore is to-day!"

The negro stopped to admire himself before a mirror.

"Sire, he has a favour to ask of your majesty."

"Madame," replied the king, with a courtly smile, "I am afraid Zamore is very ambitious."

"How so, sire?"

"Because he has already been granted the greatest favour he can desire."

"What is that?"

"The same that has been granted me."

"I do not understand you, sire"

"You have made him your slave."

"Oh, how charming, sire!" cried the countess.

The minister of police bowed in assent, and bit his lip to prevent himself from smiling.

"But," asked the king, "what can Zamore desire?"

"The reward of his long and numerous services."

"Yes; he is twelve years old."

"His long and numerous future services."

"Oh, very well!"

"Yes, indeed, sire. Past services have been rewarded long enough; it is now time to begin and reward future ones. There would not then be so much ingratitude."

"Ha! not a bad idea," said the king. "What do you think of it, Sartines?"

"That it would benefit all devoted servants of your majesty, sire; therefore I support it."

"Well, countess, what does Zamore want?"

"Sire, you know my little country seat of Luciennes?"

"I have merely heard it spoken of."

"It is your own fault; I have invited you to it a hundred times."

"You know the etiquette, dear countess: unless on a journey, the king can only sleep in a royal château."

"And for that very reason I wish you to make Luciennes a royal château, and Zamore its governor."

"But, countess, that would be a burlesque."

"I love burlesques, sire."

"The governors of the other castles would all exclaim, and this time with reason."

"Let them exclaim; they have often done so without reason. Kneel down, Zamore."

The little fellow knelt.

"For what is he kneeling?" asked the king.

"For the reward you are going to give him for bearing my train, and putting all the prudes of the court in a rage."

"He is really a hideous creature," said the king, bursting into a fit of laughter.

"Rise, Zamore," said the countess; "you are appointed governor of Luciennes."

"But indeed, madame——"

"I shall send Zamore all the writings necessary for his governorship. And now, sire, you may come to Luciennes; you have one more royal château from this day."

"Is there any way of refusing her anything, Sartines?"

"There may be a way, sire," replied Sartines, "but it has not yet been discovered."

"And if it should be found out, sire, there is one thing certain—it is M. de Sartines who will be the discoverer."

"How can you think so, madame," asked Sartines, trembling.

"Sire, only imagine that I have requested a favour of M. de Sartines for three months past, and it is not yet granted."

"And what is it?" asked the king.

"Oh, he knows very well!"

"I!—I swear to you, madame——"

"Does it fall under the duties of his office?"

"Yes; either in his or those of his successor."

"Madame," cried Sartines, "you really make me uneasy.'

"What is the request?" again inquired the king.

"To find me a sorcerer."

Sartines breathed more freely.

"To burn him," said the king. "It is rather too hot, countess; wait till the winter."

"No, sire; I wish to present him with a golden wand."

"Then the sorcerer foretold you some misfortune which has not befallen you."

"On the contrary, sire, he predicted a piece of good fortune which has come to pass."

"Let us hear it then, countess," said the king, throwing himself back in an arm-chair, like one who was not quite sure whether the tale would tire him or amuse him, but who must run the chance.

"With all my heart; but if I tell the tale, you must contribute the half of the sorcerer's reward."

"The whole, if you like!"

"Royally said—now listen."

"I am all attention."

"There was once——"

"It begins like a fairy tale."

"It *is* one, sire."

"Delightful—I love enchanters!"

"There was once a poor young girl, who, at the time my story commences, had neither page, nor carriage, nor negro, nor parrot, nor monkey——"

"Nor king," added Louis.

"Oh, sire!"

"And what did the poor young girl do?"

"She trotted about through the streets of Paris like any other common mortal, only she always went very quick; for it is said she was very pretty, and she was afraid of meeting some rude man."

"The young girl was a Lucretia—eh?"

"Oh, your majesty knows there have been no Lucretias since the year—I don't know what—of the foundation of Rome."

"Oh, heavens! countess, are you going to become learned?"

"No; if I were learned I should have given you a wrong date: now, I gave you none."

"True," said the king; "go on."

"The young girl one day was trotting along, as usual, when all at once, whilst crossing the Tuileries, she discovered that a man was following her."

"Oh, the deuce! Then she stopped, I presume."

"Ah, sire, what a bad opinion you have of women! It is easily seen you have only associated with marchionesses and duchesses."

"And princesses!—eh?"

"I am too polite to contradict your majesty: but what frightened the young girl was, that a fog came on, which became every moment denser."

"Sartines, do you know what causes fogs?"

The minister, thus taken unawares, started.

"Ma foi, no, sire!"

"Nor I. Well, go on, dear countess."

"She ran as fast as she could, passed through the gate, and found herself in the square which bears your majesty's name, when she found the unknown, from whom she thought she had escaped, face to face with her. She uttered a cry——"

"Was he so very ugly, then?"

"No, sire, he was a handsome young man, of six or eight and twenty, of a dark complexion, with large speaking eyes, and a pleasing voice."

"And the heroine was afraid? Peste! how easily she was frightened!"

"She was not quite so much so when she looked at him; still, it was not a pleasant situation in that dense fog. So, clasping her hands, she said: 'I implore you, sir, not to do me any harm.' The unknown shook his head, smiled, and replied, 'Heaven is my witness, I have no evil intentions towards you.' 'What, then, do you want?' I asked. 'To obtain a promise from you.' 'What can I promise you, sir?' 'Promise to grant me the first favour I shall ask when—' 'When?' repeated the young girl likewise. 'When you are queen.'"

"And what did the young girl do?" said the king.

"Sire, she thought it would be engaging herself to nothing, so she promised."

"And what became of the sorcerer?"

"He disappeared."

"And Sartines refuses to find him? he is wrong."

"Sire, I do not refuse; but I cannot find him."

"Oh, sir," said the countess, "that word *cannot* should never be in the dictionary of the police."

"Madame, we are on his track."

"Yes; what you always say when you are baffled."

"It is the truth; but consider what trivial directions you have given."

"How!—trivial!—young, handsome, dark complexion, black hair, splendid eyes, a pleasing voice."

"Oh, the devil! how you speak of him, countess!—Sartines, I forbid you to find that young man," said the king.

"You are wrong, sire; for I only wish to ask one simple question."

"Is it about yourself?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?—his prediction is accomplished."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; you are queen."

"Very nearly."

"What has the sorcerer, then, to tell you more?"

"He has to tell me when the queen will be presented."

"That is no concern of his," and the king made a grimace which showed that he thought they were getting on dangerous ground.

"And whose concern is it?"

"Your own."

"Mine?"

"Yes; you must find a lady to present you."

"Oh! very likely, among the prudes of the court! Your majesty knows they are all sold to Choiseul and Praslin."

"What! was there not an agreement made between us that the ministers should never be named here?"

"I did not promise, sire."

"Well, I request you to leave them in their places, and keep your own place. Believe me, the best is yours."

"Alas! then for foreign affairs and the navy!"

"Countess," interrupted the king, "in heaven's name, no politics!"

At this moment Dorée entered, and whispered a word or two in her mistress's ear.

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" cried she.

"What is it?" asked the king.

"Chon, sire, who has just returned from a journey, and wishes to pay her respects to your majesty."

"Let her come in! let her come in! Indeed, for some days past, I felt that I wanted something, without knowing exactly what it was."

"Thanks, sire!" said Chon, as she entered—then, going up to her sister, she whispered: "It is all settled!"

The countess uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Well, what now?" asked the king.

"Nothing, sire. I am only glad to see her again."

"I am glad, too. How do you do, little Chon?"

"May I say a word or two, sire, to my sister?"

"Yes, yes, child; and while you are talking together, I shall ask Sartines where you have been."

"Sire," said the minister, wishing to avoid being questioned on that point, "may I beg your majesty to allow me a few moments on business of the utmost importance?"

"Oh, I have very little time now, M. de Sartines," said the king, beginning to yawn.

"Only two words, your majesty."

"About what?"

"About those people with the second sight—these illuminati—these workers of miracles——"

"Pooh! jugglers! Give them permission to exercise their trade, and there will be nothing to fear from them."

"The matter is more serious than your majesty supposes. Every day we have new masonic lodges formed—they are now a powerful sect, attracting to them all the enemies of monarchy—the philosophers, the encyclopedists. Voltaire is to be received by them in great state."

"He? he is dying."

"He, sire! Oh! no, sire, he is not such a fool."

"He has confessed."

"Merely a trick."

"In the habit of a Capuchin."

"That was an impiety, sire. But, with regard to these freemasons, they are always active—they write, they talk, they form associations, correspond with foreign countries—they intrigue, they threaten—even now they are full of expectation of a great chief or head of the whole body, as I have learned from some words which escaped from one of their number."

"Well, Sartines, when this chief comes, catch him and put him in the Bastille, and the whole affair is settled."

"Sire, these persons have great resources."

"Have they greater than you, sir, who have the whole police of a large kingdom?"

"Your majesty was induced to expel the Jesuits—it was the philosophers whom you should have expelled."

"Come, come!—no more about those poor quill-drivers!"

"Sire, those quills are dangerous which are cut by the pen-knife of Damiens."

Louis XV. turned pale.

"These philosophers, sire, whom you despise ——"

"Well, sir?"

"Will destroy the monarchy, sire."

"How long will they take to do that?"

Sartines stared at this coolness.

"How can I tell, sire? Perhaps fifteen, twenty, or thirty years."

"Well, my dear friend, in fifteen or twenty years I shall be no more; so talk of all these things to my successor."

And the king turned to Madame Dubarry, who, seeming to have waited for this movement, said, with a heavy sigh, "Oh, heavens! what is it you tell me, Chon?"

"Yes, what is it?" asked the king, "for you both look very wretched."

"Oh, sire, there is good cause for it!"

"Speak—let me hear what has happened."

"My poor brother!"

"Poor Jean!"

"Do you think it must be cut off?"

"They hope not."

"Cut off?—what?" asked the king.

"His arm, sire!"

"Cut off the viscount's arm!—why, pray?"

"Because he has been seriously wounded."

"Wounded in the arm."

"Oh, yes, sire."

"Ay, in some drunken squabble in a filthy tavern."

"No, sire; on the highway."

"But how did that happen?"

"It happened because an enemy wished to assassinate him, sire."

"Ah, the poor viscount!" exclaimed the king, who had very little feeling for the sufferings of others, although he could look wonderfully compassionate. "But to assassinate him! This is a serious matter, is it not, Sartines?"

The minister looked much less moved than the king, but was, in reality, a great deal more uneasy on the subject. He drew near the sisters.

"Can it be possible," asked he, anxiously, "that such a misfortune has occurred?"

"Oh, yes, sir, it is but too possible," said Chon, very mournfully.

"Assassinated!—but how?"

"He was waylaid."

"Waylaid? Ha! Sartines, this is an affair for you," said the king.

"Relate all the circumstances, madame," said the minister, "and do not, I entreat you, allow your just resentment to exaggerate them. We shall, by being strictly just, be most severe; and, where things are looked at closely and coolly, they are often not so very serious as we at first apprehended."

"Oh," cried Chon, "this is not an affair which has been related to me! I saw the whole!"

"Well, but what did you see, Chon?" inquired the king.

"I saw a man fall on my brother, and, having forced him to draw in self-defence, wound him shockingly."

"Was the man alone?" asked Sartines.

"No, indeed, he had six others with him."

"The poor viscount!" said the king, looking at the countess, that he might know exactly what degree of grief to exhibit—"forced to fight! poor fellow!" But, seeing that she did not relish this pleasantry—"And he was wounded?" he added, in a compassionate voice.

"But how did the quarrel come about?" asked the minister of police, trying if it were possible to betray her into telling the truth.

"Oh, in the most trifling way in the world! All about post-horses which I wanted in order to hasten back to my sister, as I had promised to be with her this morning."

"Ha! Sartines, this merits punishment, does it not?" said the king.

"It does, sire, and I shall take all the necessary information on the subject. What was the name of the aggressor, madame, his condition—his rank?"

"His rank?—he is a military man—an officer in the bodyguard of the dauphin, I think. As to his name—he is called Baverney, Faverney, Taverney—yes, Taverney—that is it."

"Madame, to-morrow he shall sleep in the Bastille."

"Oh, no!" said the countess, who until now had very diplomatically kept silence; "Oh, no!"

"Why, oh no?" asked the king; "why should not the fellow be imprisoned? You know I detest the military."

"And I repeat, sire," said the countess, doggedly, "that I am quite sure nothing will be done to the man who assassinated the viscount."

"Ha! countess, this is very curious—explain it, if you please."

"That is easily done—he will be protected."

"And who will protect him?"

"The person at whose instigation he acted."

'And that person will protect him against us? Oh, that is rather too much, countess!"

"Madame——" stammered the Count de Sartines, for he felt that a blow was coming, and he was not prepared to ward it off.

"Yes!" exclaimed the countess, "he will be protected against you, and there will be nothing said. Do you suppose you are the master, sire?"

The king felt the blow which the minister had foreseen, and he determined to bear it.

"I see that you are going to plunge into politics," said he, "and find out some reasons of state for a paltry duel!"

"There, now! you abandon me already; the assassination has become nothing but a duel, now that you suspect the quarter whence it comes!"

"So! I am in for it!" said the king, going to the great Chinese fountain, turning the cock, and making the birds sing, the fishes swim, and the mandarins come out.

'And you don't know who aimed this blow?" asked the countess, pulling the ears of Zamore, who was lying at her feet.

"No, on my word!" said the king.

"Or suspect?"

"I swear I don't. Do you, countess?"

"No, I don't suspect, I know positively—I am going to tell you, and it will be no news to you, I am certain!"

"Countess, countess, do you know that in what you said you gave the lie to your king?" and Louis tried to look dignified.

"Sire, I know I am a little warm, but if you think I shall quietly allow my brother to be killed by the Duke de Choiseul——"

"Yes—there it is—Choiseul again!" exclaimed the king in a loud voice, as if he had not expected this name, which for the last ten minutes he had been dreading.

"Well, it is because your majesty is determined not to see that he is my worst enemy; but I see it plainly, for he does not even take the trouble to hide his hatred from me."

"He is far from hating any one to that degree that he would cause him to be assassinated."

"There you see—when Choiseul is mentioned, you are on his side immediately!"

"Now, my dear countess, politics again!"

"Oh, Monsieur de Sartines!" cried she, "is it not dreadful to be treated thus?"

"No, no—if it be as you think——"

"I know what I think," she interrupted, passionately; "and what I am sure of—the affair will be given up!"

"Now, do not get angry, countess," said the king, "it shall not be given up—you shall be defended, and so well——"

"So well what?"

"So well that he who attacked poor Jean shall pay dearly for it."

"Yes, the instrument will be broken, but the hand that directed it will be taken and kindly pressed!"

"Well, but is it not right to punish this Monsieur Taverney, who actually committed the assault?"

"Oh, certainly, but it is not right, that what you do for me is no more than would be done to a soldier who should give a blow to a shopkeeper at the theatre. I will not be treated like every common person. If you do not do more for those whom you love than for those who are indifferent to you, I had rather remain alone in obscurity like these latter—their relations, at least, are not assassinated!"

"Oh, countess!" said the king, imploringly, "I got up for once in such good spirits, disposed to be gay, happy, and pleased with every one, and now you are spoiling my morning completely."

"Very fine, indeed! It is a delightful morning for me, of course, when my relations are being massacred!"

The king, in spite of his internal fears of the terrible storm that was gathering, could not help smiling at the word "massacred." The countess started up in a towering passion.

"Ah! is that the way you pity me?" said she.

"Now, now—do not get angry."

"Yes—I will get angry!"

"You are very wrong—you look lovely when you smile—but really ugly in a passion."

"What matters it to me how I look, when my beauty does not prevent me from being sacrificed to state intrigues."

"Now, my dear countess——"

"No, no. Choose between me and Choiseul!"

"Dear creature, it is impossible to choose—you are both necessary to me."

"Well, then, I shall retire and leave the field to my enemies; I shall die of grief, but the Duke de Choiseul will be satisfied, and that will console you."

"I swear to you, countess, that he has not any dislike to you; on the

contrary, he admires you. He is an excellent man, after all," added the king, in a louder tone, that the minister of police might hear him.

"An excellent man! Sire, you wish to drive me to desperation. An excellent man who causes people to be assassinated?"

"Mere suspicion," said the king.

"And, besides," Sartines ventured to say, "a quarrel, a duel between military men is so common—so natural!"

"Ha! Monsieur de Sartines, and are you also against me?" cried the countess.

The minister of police understood this *tu quoque*, and retreated before her anger. There was a moment of deep and ominous silence.

"Ah, Chon!" said the king, in the midst of the general consternation, "you see your handiwork!"

"Your majesty will pardon me," said she, "if the grief of the sister has made me forget for a moment my duty as a subject."

"Kind creature!" murmured the king. "Come, countess, forget and forgive!"

"Yes, sire, I shall forgive—only I shall set out for Luciennes, and thence for Boulogne."

"Boulogne-sur-mer?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire; I shall quit a kingdom where the king is afraid of his minister."

"Madame!" exclaimed Louis, with an offended air.

"Sire, that I may not any longer be wanting in respect to you, permit me to retire," and the countess rose, observing with the corner of her eye what effect her movement had produced.

The king gave his usual heavy sigh of weariness, which said plainly, "I am getting rather tired of this." Chon understood what the sigh meant, and saw that it would be dangerous to push matters to extremity. She caught her sister by the gown, and approaching the king:

"Sire," said she, "my sister's affection for the poor viscount has carried her too far. It is I who have committed the fault—it is I who must repair it. As the humblest of your majesty's subjects, I beg from your majesty justice for my brother. I accuse nobody—your wisdom will discover the guilty."

"Why, that is precisely what I wish myself," said the king, "that justice should be done. If a man have not committed a certain crime, let him not be reproached with it; but if he have, let him be punished." And Louis looked towards the countess as he spoke, with the hope of once more catching the hopes he had entertained of an amusing morning—a morning which seemed turning out so dismally. The good-natured countess could not help pitying the king, whose want of occupation and emptiness of mind made him feel tired and dispirited except when with her. She turned half round, for she had already made a step towards the door, and said, with the sweetest submission, "Do I wish for anything but justice?—only let not my well-grounded suspicions be cruelly repulsed."

"Your suspicions are sacred to me, countess," cried the king; "and if they be changed into certainty, you shall see. But now I think of it—how easy to know the truth!—let the Duke de Choiseul be sent for."

"Oh, your majesty knows that he never comes into these apartments—he would scorn to do so. His sister, however, is not of his mind—she wishes for nothing better than to be here."

The king laughed. The countess, encouraged by this, went on: "The Duke de Choiseul apes the dauphin—he will not compromise his dignity."

"The dauphin is religious, countess."

"And the duke a hypocrite, sire."

"I promise you, my dear countess, you shall see him here, for I shall summon him. He must come, as it is on state business, and we shall have all explained in Chon's presence, who saw all—we shall confront them, as the lawyers say. Eh, Sartines? Let some one go for the Duke de Choiseul."

"And let some one bring me my monkey. Dorée, my monkey!" cried the countess.

These words, which were addressed to the waiting-maid, who was arranging a dressing-box, could be heard in the ante-room when the door was opened to despatch the usher for the prime minister, and they were responded to by a broken, lisping voice:

"The countess's monkey!—that must be me—I hasten to present myself."

And with these words entered a little hunchback, dressed with the utmost splendour.

"The Duke de Tresmes!" said the countess, annoyed by his appearance; "I did not summon you, duke."

"You asked for your monkey, madame," said the duke, bowing to the king, the countess, and the minister, "and seeing among the courtiers no ape half so ugly as myself, I hastened to obey your call," and the duke laughed, showing his great teeth so oddly that the countess could not help laughing also.

"Shall I stay?" asked the duke, as if his whole life could not repay the favour.

"Ask his majesty, duke—he is master here."

The duke turned to the king, with the air of a suppliant.

"Yes, stay, duke, stay!" said the king, glad to find any additional means of amusement. At this moment the usher threw open the doors.

"Oh!" said the king, with a slight expression of dissatisfaction on his face, "is it the Duke de Choiseul already!"

"No, sire," replied the usher, "it is monseigneur the dauphin, who desires to speak to you."

The countess almost started from her chair with joy, for she imagined the dauphin was going to become her friend; but Chon, who was more clear-sighted, frowned.

"Well, where is the dauphin?" asked the king, impatiently.

"In your majesty's apartments—his royal highness awaits your return."

"It is fated I shall never have a minute's repose," grumbled the king. Then, all at once remembering that the audience demanded by the dauphin might spare him the scene with M. de Choiseul, he thought better of it. "I am coming," said he, "I am coming. Good-bye, countess. See how I am dragged in all directions!"

"But will your majesty go just when the Duke de Choiseul is coming?"

"What can I do?—the first slave is the king. Oh, if those rogues of philosophers knew what it is to be a king!—but above all a king of France."

"But, sire, you can stay."

"Oh, I must not keep the dauphin waiting. People say already that I have no affection except for my daughters."

"But what shall I say to the duke?"

"Oh, tell him to come to my apartments, countess."

And, to put an end to any farther remonstrance, he kissed her hand, and

disappeared running, as was his habit whenever he feared to lose a victory gained by his temporising policy and his petty cunning. The countess trembled with passion, and clasping her hands she exclaimed, "So he has escaped once more!"

But the king did not hear those words: the door was already closed behind him, and he passed through the ante-rooms, saying to the courtiers, "Go in, gentlemen, go in, the countess will see you; but you will find her very dull, on account of the accident which has befallen poor Viscount Jean."

The courtiers looked at one another in amazement, for they had not heard of the accident. Many hoped that the viscount was dead, but all put on countenances suitable to the occasion. Those who were best pleased looked the most sympathetic, and they entered.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SALOON OF TIMEPIECES.

IN that large hall of the palace of Versailles which was called the Saloon of Timepieces, a young man walked slowly up and down, with his arms hanging and his head bent forward. He appeared to be about seventeen years of age, was of a fair complexion, and his eyes were mild in their expression; but it must be acknowledged that there was a slight degree of vulgarity in his demeanour. On his breast sparkled a diamond star, rendered more brilliant by the dark violet-coloured velvet of his coat; and his white satin waistcoat, embroidered with silver, was crossed by the blue ribbon supporting the cross of St. Louis.

None could mistake in this young man the profile so expressive of dignity and kindliness which formed the characteristic type of the elder branch of the House of Bourbon, of which he was at once the most striking and most exaggerated image. In fact, Louis Auguste, Duke de Berry, Dauphin of France (afterwards Louis XVI.), had the Bourbon nose even longer and more aquiline than in his predecessors. His forehead was lower and more retreating than Louis XV.'s, and the double chin of his grandfather was so remarkable in him, that although he was at the time we speak of young and thin, his chin formed nearly one-third of the length of his face.

Although well made, there was something embarrassed in the movement of his legs and shoulders, and his walk was slow and rather awkward. Suppleness, activity, and strength seemed centred only in his arms, and more particularly in his fingers, which displayed, as it were, that character which in other persons is expressed on the forehead, in the mouth, and in the eyes. The dauphin continued to pace in silence the Saloon of Timepieces—the same in which, eight years before, Louis XV. had given to Madame de Pompadour the decree of the parliament exiling the Jesuits from the kingdom—and as he walked he seemed plunged in reverie.

At last, however, he seemed to become impatient of waiting there alone, and to amuse himself he began to look at the timepieces, remarking, as Charles V. had done, the differences which are found in the most regular clocks. These differences are a singular but decided manifestation of the inequality existing in all material things, whether regulated or not regulated by the hand of man. He stopped before the large clock at the lower end

of the saloon—the same place it occupies at present—which, by a clever arrangement of machinery, marks the days, the months, the years, the phases of the moon, the course of the planets—in short, exhibiting to the still more curious machine called man, all that is most interesting in his progressive movement through life to death.

The prince examined this clock with the eye of an amateur, and leaned now to the right, now to the left, to examine the movement of such or such a wheel. Then he returned to his place in front, watching how the second-hand glided rapidly on, like those flies which, with their long slender legs, skim over the surface of a pond without disturbing the liquid crystal of its waters. This contemplation naturally led him to think that a very great number of seconds had passed since he had been waiting there. It is true, also, that many had passed before he had ventured to send to inform the king that he was waiting for him.

All at once the hand on which the young prince's eyes were fixed stopped as if by enchantment, the wheels ceased their measured rotation, the springs became still, and deep silence took possession of the machine, but a moment before so full of noise and motion. No more ticking, no more oscillations, no more movement of the wheels or of the hands. The time-piece had died.

Had some grain of sand, some atom, penetrated into one of the wheels, and stopped its movements? or was the genius of the machine resting, wearied with its eternal agitation? Surprised by this sudden death, this stroke of apoplexy occurring before his eyes, the dauphin forgot why he had come thither, and how long he had waited. Above all, he forgot that hours are not counted in eternity by the beating of metal upon metal, nor arrested even for a moment in their course by the hindrance of any wheel, but that they are recorded on the dial of eternity, established even before the birth of worlds by the unchangeable hand of the Almighty.

He therefore opened the glass door of the crystal pagoda, the genius of which had ceased to act, and put his head inside to examine the timepiece more closely. But the large pendulum was in his way; he slipped in his supple fingers, and took it off. This was not enough; the dauphin still found the cause of the lethargy of the machine hidden from him. He then supposed that the person who had the care of the clocks of the palace had forgotten to wind up this timepiece, and he took down the key from a hook and began to wind it up like a man quite accustomed to the business. But he could only turn it three times—a proof that something was astray in the mechanism. He drew from his pocket a little file, and with the end of it pushed one of the wheels; they all creaked for half a second, then stopped again.

The malady of the clock was becoming serious; the dauphin, therefore, began carefully to unscrew several parts of it, laying them all in order on a console beside him. Then, drawn on by his ardour, he began to take to pieces still more and more of the complicated machine, and to search minutely into its most hidden and mysterious recesses. Suddenly he uttered a cry of joy—he discovered that a screw which acted on one of the springs had become loose, and had thus impeded the movement of the motive wheel.

He immediately began to screw it; and then, with a wheel in his left hand, and his little file in his right, he plunged his head again into the interior of the clock.

He was busy at his work, absorbed in contemplation of the mechanism of the timepiece, when a door opened, and a voice announced, "The king!"

But the dauphin heard nothing but the melodious sound of that ticking, which his hand had again awakened, as if it were the beating of a heart which a clever physician had restored to life.

The king looked around on all sides, and it was some minutes before he discovered the dauphin, whose head was hidden in the opening, and whose legs alone were visible. He approached, smiling, and tapped his grandson on the shoulder.

"What the devil are you doing there?" said he. The dauphin drew out his head quickly, but, at the same time, with all the care necessary to avoid doing any harm to the beautiful object which he had undertaken to mend.

"Sire—your majesty sees," replied the young man, blushing at being surprised in the midst of his occupations, "I was amusing myself until you came."

"Yes, in destroying my clock—a very pretty amusement!"

"Oh no, sire! I was mending it. The principal wheel would not move; it was prevented by this screw. I have tightened the screw, and now it goes."

"But you will blind yourself with looking into that thing. I would not put my head into such a trap for all the gold in the world."

"Oh, it will do me no harm, sire—I understand all about it. I always take to pieces, clean, and put together again, that beautiful watch which your majesty gave me on my fourteenth birthday."

"Very well; but stop now, if you please, and leave your mechanics. You wish to speak to me?"

"I, sire?" said the young man, colouring again.

"Of course, since you sent to say you were waiting for me."

"It is true, sire," replied the dauphin, with downcast eyes.

"Well, what is it? Answer me—if it is of no importance I must go, for I am just setting off for Marly." Louis XV., as was his custom, already sought to escape.

The dauphin placed his wheel and his file on a chair, which indicated that he had really something important to say, since he interrupted his important work for it.

"Do you want money?" asked the king, sharply. "If so, I shall send you some;" and he made a step towards the door.

"Oh no, sire; I have still a thousand crowns remaining of the sum I received last month."

"What economy!" said the king; "and how well Monsieur de la Vauguyon has educated him! I think he has precisely all the virtues I have not."

The young prince made a violent effort over himself. "Sire," said he, "is the dauphiness yet very far distant?"

"Do you not know as well as I how far off she is?" replied the king.

"I?" stammered out the dauphin.

"Of course—you heard the account of her journey read yesterday. Last Monday she was at Nancy, and she ought to be now about forty-five leagues from Paris."

"Sire, does not your majesty think her royal highness travels very slowly?"

"By no means," replied the king; "I think she travels very fast for a woman. And then, you know, there are the receptions and the rejoicings on the road. She travels at least ten leagues every two days, one with another."

"I think it very little, sire," said the dauphin, timidly.

Louis XV. was more and more astonished at the appearance of impatience, which he had been far from suspecting.

"Come, come," said he, smiling slyly, "don't be impatient; your dauphiness will arrive soon."

"Sire, might not these ceremonies on the road be shortened?" continued the dauphin.

"Impossible; she has already passed through two or three towns, where she should have made a stay, without stopping."

"But these delays will be eternal; and then, sire, I think, besides——" said the dauphin, still more timidly.

"Well, what do you think? Let me hear it; speak!"

"I think that the service is badly performed."

"How?—what service?"

"The service for the journey."

"Nonsense! I sent thirty thousand horses to be ready on the road, thirty carriages, sixty wagons—I don't know how many carts. If carts, carriages, and horses were put in file, they would reach from this to Strasbourg. How can you say, then, there is bad attendance on the road?"

"Well, sire, in spite of all your majesty's goodness, I am almost certain that what I say is true; but perhaps I have used an improper term, and instead of badly performed I should have said badly arranged."

The king raised his head, and fixed his eyes on the dauphin; he began to comprehend that more was meant than met the ear, in the few words which his royal highness had ventured to utter.

"Thirty thousand horses," he repeated, "thirty carriages, sixty wagons, two regiments. I ask you, Mr. Philosopher, have you ever heard of a dauphiness entering France with such an attendance as that before?"

"I confess, sire, that things have been royally done, and as your majesty alone knows how to do them. But has your majesty specially recommended that these horses and carriages should be employed solely for her royal highness and her train?"

The king looked at his grandson for the third time. A vague suspicion began to sting him, a slight remembrance to illuminate his mind, and a sort of confused analogy between what the dauphin was saying and a disagreeable circumstance of late occurrence began to suggest itself to him.

"A fine question!" said he. "Certainly, everything has been ordered for her royal highness, and for her alone, and therefore, I repeat, she cannot fail to arrive very soon. But why do you look at me in that way?" added he, in a decided tone, which to the dauphin seemed even threatening. "Are you amusing yourself in studying my features as you study the springs of your mechanical works?"

The dauphin had opened his mouth to speak, but became silent at this address.

"Very well," said the king, sharply; "it appears you have no more to say—hey? Are you satisfied now? Your dauphiness will arrive soon; all is arranged delightfully for her on the road; you are as rich as Crœsus with your own private purse. And now, since your mind is at ease, be good enough to put my clock in order again."

The dauphin did not stir.

"Do you know," said the king, laughing, "I have a great mind to make you the principal watchmaker for the palace, with a good salary?"

The dauphin looked down, and, intimidated by the king's look, took up the wheel and the file which he had laid on the chair. The king, in the

meantime, had quietly gained the door. "What the devil," said he, looking at him, "did he mean with his badly arranged service? Well, well! I have escaped another scene, for he is certainly dissatisfied about something."

In fact, the dauphin, generally so patient, had stamped with his foot as the king turned away from him.

"He is commencing again," murmured the king, laughing; "decidedly, I have nothing for it but to fly." But just as he opened the door, he saw on the threshold the Duke de Choiseul, who bowed profoundly.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE COURT OF KING PETAUD.

THE king made a step backwards at the sight of this new actor in the scene, come, no doubt, to prevent him from escaping as he had hoped. "Ha!" thought he, "I had forgot him; but he is welcome, and I will make him pay for what the others have made me suffer."

"Ha! you are there!" cried he. "I sent for you—did you know that?"

"Yes, sire," replied the minister, coldly; "I was dressing to wait on your majesty when your orders reached me."

"I wished to speak to you on serious matters," said the king, frowning, in order, if possible, to intimidate his minister. Unfortunately for the king, Monsieur de Choiseul was one of the men least likely to be daunted in his dominions.

"And I also, if it please your majesty," said he, bowing, "have serious matters to speak of." At the same time, he exchanged a look with the dauphin, who was still half hidden by the clock.

The king stopped short. "Ha!" thought he, "now I am caught between two fires; there is no escape."

"You know, I presume," said the king, hastily, in order to have the first word, "that poor Viscount Jean has had a narrow escape from assassination, that is to say, that he has received a wound in his arm."

"I came to speak of that affair to your majesty."

"I understand—you wished to prevent unpleasant reports?"

"I wished, sire, to anticipate all remarks."

"Then you know the whole particulars, sir?" inquired the king, in a significant manner.

"Perfectly."

"Ha!" said the king, "I was told so in a place likely to be well-informed."

The Duke of Choiseul seemed quite unmoved. The dauphin continued turning the screw in the clock, his head bent down, but he lost not a syllable of the conversation.

"I shall now tell you how the affair happened," said the king.

"Does your majesty think that you have been well-informed?" asked Monsieur de Choiseul.

"Oh, as to that——"

"We are all attention, sire."

"We!" repeated the king.

"Yes; his royal highness the dauphin and I."

"His royal highness the dauphin?" repeated the king, turning his eyes

from the respectful Choiseul to the attentive Louis Augustus, "and pray in what does this squabble concern his royal highness?"

"It concerns his royal highness," said the duke, bowing to the young prince, "because her royal highness the dauphiness was the cause of it."

"The dauphiness the cause?" said the king, starting.

"Certainly; if you are ignorant of that, sire, your majesty has been very badly informed."

"The dauphiness and Jean Dubarry!" said the king; "this is likely to be a curious tale! Come, explain this, Monsieur de Choiseul, conceal nothing, even though it were the dauphiness herself who pierced Dubarry's arm!"

"Sire, it was not the dauphiness," replied Choiseul, still calm and unmoved; "it was one of the gentlemen of her escort."

"Oh," said the king, again becoming grave, "an officer whom you know."

"No, sire, but an officer whom your majesty ought to know, if you remember all who have served you well—an officer whose father's name was honoured at Philipsbourg, at Fontenoy, at Mahon—a Taverney-Maison-Rouge."

The dauphin seemed to draw a deeper breath, as if to inhale this name and thus preserve it in his memory.

"A Maison-Rouge," said the king; "certainly I know the name; and why did he attack Jean, whom I like so much? Perhaps because I like him!—such absurd jealousies, such discontents, are almost seditious!"

"Sire, will your majesty deign to listen to me," said Monsieur de Choiseul.

The king saw there was no other way for him to escape from this troublesome business but by getting in a passion, and he exclaimed, "I tell you, sir, that I see the beginning of a conspiracy against my peace, an organized persecution of my family!"

"Ah, sire," said Monsieur de Choiseul, "is it for defending the dauphiness, your majesty's daughter-in-law, that these reproaches are cast on a brave young man?"

The dauphin raised his head and folded his arms. "For my part," said he, "I cannot but feel grateful to the man who exposed his life for a princess who in a fortnight will be my wife."

"Exposed his life!—exposed his life!" stammered the king; "what about? Let me know that—what about?"

"About the horses of her royal highness, the dauphiness," replied the duke; "Viscount Jean Dubarry, who was already travelling very fast, took upon him to insist on having some of those horses which were appropriated to the use of her royal highness—no doubt that he might get on still faster."

The king bit his lip and changed colour—the threatening phantom from which he had so lately hoped to escape now reappeared in all its horrors. "It is not possible," murmured he, to gain time. "I know the whole affair—you have been misinformed, duke."

"No, sire, I have not been misinformed; what I have the honour to tell your majesty is the simple truth. Viscount Jean Dubarry offered an insult to the dauphiness by insisting on taking for his use horses appointed for her service. After having ill-treated the master of the post-house, he was going to take them by force when the Chevalier Philip de Taverney arrived, sent forward by her royal highness to have horses in readiness for her, and after he had several times summoned him in a friendly and conciliating manner——"

"Oh, oh!" grumbled the king.

"I repeat, sire, after he had several times, in a friendly and conciliating manner, summoned the viscount to desist, he was at length obliged to draw his sword."

"Yes," said the dauphin, "I pledge myself for the truth of what the duke asserts."

"Then you also know of this affair?" said the king, exceedingly surprised.

"I know all the circumstances perfectly, sire," replied the dauphin.

The minister bowed, delighted at having such a supporter. "Will your royal highness deign to proceed?" said he. "His majesty will doubtless have more confidence in the assertions of his august son than in mine."

"Yes, sire," continued the dauphin, without testifying for the Duke de Choiseul's zeal in his cause all that gratitude which might have been expected, "yes, sire, I know the circumstances, and I had come to tell your majesty that Viscount Dubarry has not only insulted the dauphiness in interfering with the arrangements made for her journey, but he has also insulted me in opposing a gentleman of my regiment who was doing his duty."

The king shook his head. "We must inquire," said he; "we must inquire."

"I have already inquired, sire," said the dauphin, gently, "and have no doubt in the matter; the viscount drew his sword on my officer."

"Did he draw first?" asked the king, happy to seize any chance of putting his adversary in fault.

The dauphin coloured, and looked to the minister for assistance. "Sire," said the latter, "swords were crossed by two men, one of whom was insulting, the other defending, the dauphiness—that is all."

"Yes, but which was the aggressor?" asked the king; "I know poor Jean—he is as gentle as a lamb."

"The aggressor, in my opinion, sire," said the dauphin, with his usual mildness, "is he who is in the wrong."

"It is a delicate matter to decide," replied the king; "the aggressor he who is in the wrong?—in the wrong?—but if the officer was insolent?"

"Insolent!" cried the Duke de Choiseul; "insolent towards a man who wanted to take by force horses sent there for the use of the dauphiness? Is it possible you can think so, sire?"

The dauphin turned pale, but said nothing. The king saw that he was between two fires.

"I should say warm, perhaps, not insolent," said he.

"But your majesty knows," said the minister, taking advantage of the king's having yielded a step, to make a step forward; "your majesty knows that a zealous servant can never be in the wrong."

"Oh, perhaps! But how did you become acquainted with this event, sir?" said he, turning sharply to the dauphin, without ceasing, however, to observe the duke, who endeavoured vainly to hide the embarrassment which this sudden question caused him.

"By a letter, sire," replied the dauphin.

"A letter from whom?"

"A letter from a person concerned for her royal highness, the dauphiness, and who thinks it singular that any one should dare to affront her."

"Ha!" cried the king, "more mysteries, secret correspondences, plots! Every one is beginning again to plan annoyances for me, as in the time of the Marchioness de Pompadour!"

"No, sire," said the minister, "this affair is no plot, and can be settled very simply. It is the crime of treason in the second degree; let the guilty person be punished, and all will be settled."

At this word, punished, Louis XV. saw in fancy the countess furious, and Chon in a rage—he saw peace flying from his dwelling (peace, which he had been seeking all his life, but had never been able to find), and intestine war with crooked nails and eyes red with tears entering in her stead.

"Punished!" cried he, "without the accused having been heard?—without knowing which side is in the right? You make a very extraordinary proposal to me, duke—you wish to draw odium on me!"

"But, sire, who will henceforward respect her royal highness the dauphiness, if a severe example is not made of the person who first insulted her?"

"Certainly, sire," added the dauphin, "it would be a scandal."

"An example?—a scandal?" cried the king. "Mordieu! if I make an example of all the scandalous things that go on around me, I may pass my life in signing arrests for the Bastille! I have signed enough of them as it is, Heaven knows!"

"In this case it is necessary, sire," said the duke.

"Sire, I intreat your majesty," said the dauphin.

"What! do you not think him punished already, by the wound he has received?"

"No, sire; for he might have wounded the Chevalier de Taverney."

"And in such a case, what would you have done?"

"I should have demanded his head."

"But that was only what was done in the case of Monsieur de Montgomery, for killing King Henry II.," said the king.

"He killed the king by accident, sire—Viscount Dubarry insulted the dauphiness intentionally."

"And you, sir," said the king, turning to the dauphin, "do you wish to have Jean's head?"

"No, sire; I am not in favour of the punishment of death, as your majesty knows; I shall merely demand from you the viscount's banishment."

The king started up.

"Banishment for a tavern quarrel? Louis, you are severe, notwithstanding your philanthropical notions; it is true that before becoming philanthropist you were a mathematician, and——"

"Will your majesty deign to proceed?"

"A mathematician would sacrifice the universe to his problem."

"Sire," said the dauphin, "I have no ill-will towards the Viscount Dubarry, personally."

"With whom, then, are you angry?"

"With the insulter of her royal highness the dauphiness."

"What a model for husbands!" cried the king, ironically; "but I am not so easy of belief. I see very well who is attacked under all this—I see to what people would lead me with their exaggerations!"

"Sire," said M. de Choiseul, "do not be misled—nothing has been exaggerated—the public are indignant at the insolence which has been shown in this affair."

"The public?—there is another monster with which you frighten yourself, or rather with which you would frighten me. Shall I listen to this public, which by the thousand mouths of libellists, and pamphleteers, and

ballad-mongers, tells me that I am robbed, tossed in a blanket, betrayed on all hands? No, no; I let the public talk, and I laugh. Do as I do. Pardieu! close your ears—and when your great public is tired of bawling it will stop. There you are again, making your discontented bow—and Louis is putting on a sulky face! Heavens! is it not singular that what is done for the lowest individual cannot be done for me? I cannot be allowed to live quietly in my own fashion! Everybody hates what I love, and eternally loves what I hate! Am I in my senses, or am I a fool? Am I the master, or am I not?"

The dauphin took up his file, and returned to his work in the clock. The Duke de Choiseul bowed exactly as before.

"There now—no answer! Answer something, will you? Mordieu! you will kill me with vexation—first at your talk, then at your silence!—with your petty hatreds and your petty fears!"

"I do not hate the Viscount Dubarry," said the dauphin, smiling.

"And I do not fear him, sire," said the minister, haughtily.

"You are both very ill-natured," cried the king, pretending to be in a great passion, when he was in reality only out of temper: "you wish to make me the laughing-stock of all Europe—to give my cousin of Prussia something to make jests on—to make me realise the court of King Petaud, which that rascal, Voltaire, has described—but I will not be what you wish!—no!—you shall not have that satisfaction. I know what concerns my own honour, and I shall attend to it in my own way, and only as I choose myself!"

"Sire," said the dauphin, with that immovable mildness which characterised him, but at the same time with that constant perseverance of his, "this is not a matter which concerns your honour—it is the dignity of the dauphiness which has been attacked."

"His royal highness is right, sire," said the duke, "let but your majesty speak the word, and no one will again dare to insult her."

"And who would insult her?—no one intended to insult her. Jean is a stupid fellow, but he is not malignant."

"Well, then, sire," continued the minister, "let it be placed to the account of stupidity, and let him ask pardon of the Chevalier de Taverney for his mistake."

"I said before," cried the king, "that I have nothing to do in the affair; let Jean ask pardon, he is at liberty to do so; or let him decline, he is at liberty also."

"The affair given up in that way, sire, I must take the liberty to inform your majesty, will be talked about."

"So much the better!" exclaimed the king, "let it be talked about until I am deafened with it, provided I don't hear all this nonsense of yours!"

"Then," replied the minister, with his imperturbable coolness, "I am authorised by your majesty to say that Viscount Dubarry did right?"

"Authorised by me?—authorised by me?—and in an affair of which I understand nothing! You mean, I see, to drive me to extremities; but take care, duke!—take care, and, Louis, I advise you to be more cautious how you conduct yourself towards me! I shall leave you to think of what I have said, for I am tired out—I cannot bear this any longer. Good-bye, gentlemen! I am going to see my daughters, and then I shall take refuge at Marly, where I may hope for some tranquillity, if you do not follow me."

At this moment, and as the king was going towards the door, it was opened, and an usher appeared.

"Sire," said he, "her royal highness the Princess Louise is awaiting your majesty in the gallery to bid you farewell."

"To bid me farewell?" exclaimed the king, in alarm, "where is she going?"

"Her royal highness says that she has had your majesty's permission to leave the palace."

"Ha! another scene!—this is my bigot daughter going to show off some of her follies—in truth, I am the most wretched of men!"

And he left the apartment running.

"His majesty has given us no answer," said the Duke de Choiseul; "what has your royal highness decided on?"

"Ah, there it strikes!" said the young prince, listening with either a real or a pretended joy to the clock which he had made to go once more.

The minister frowned and retired backward from the saloon of time-pieces, leaving the dauphin alone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MADAME LOUISE OF FRANCE.

THE king's eldest daughter awaited him in the great gallery of Lebrun, the same in which Louis XIV., in 1683, had received the Doge Imperiali and the four Genoese senators sent to implore pardon for the republic.

At the farther end of the gallery, opposite the door by which the king must enter, were three or four ladies of honour, who seemed in the utmost consternation. Louis arrived just at the moment when groups began to form in the vestibule, for the resolution which the princess had taken only that morning was now spreading on all sides through the palace.

The Princess Louise possessed a majestic figure and a truly regal style of beauty, yet a secret sadness had left its lines on her fair forehead. Her austere practice of every virtue, and her respect for the great powers of the state—powers which for the last fifty years had only obtained a semblance of respect from interest or from fear—had caused her to be regarded with veneration by the court. We must add that she was loved even by the people, although a feeling of disaffection towards their *masters* was now general. The word tyrants had not yet been heard.

She was loved because her virtue was not stern. She was not loudly talked of, but all knew that she had a heart. She manifested this every day by works of charity, while others only showed it by shameless self-indulgence. Louis XV. feared this daughter, for the simple reason that he esteemed her. There were even times when he went so far as to be proud of her; and she was the only one of his children whom he spared in his sharp raillery or his silly familiarities. He called her madame, whilst the Princesses Adelaide, Victoire, and Sophie, he named Loque, Chiffe, and Graille.* Since the period when Marshal Saxe carried with him to the tomb the soul of the Turennes and the Condés, and with the Queen Maria Leczinska passed away the governing mind of a Maria Theresa, all became mean and worthless around the throne of France. The Princess Louise, whose character was truly regal, and, compared with those around her, seemed even heroic, alone remained to adorn the crown, like a pearl

* Tag, rag, and scrap.

of price amidst false stones and tinsel. We should be wrong in concluding from this that Louis XV. loved his daughter. Louis, it is well known, loved no one but himself: we only affirm that he preferred her to all his other children.

When he entered, he found the princess in the centre of the gallery, leaning on a table inlaid with crimson jasper and lapis lazuli. She was dressed entirely in black, and her beautiful hair, which was without powder, was covered by a double roll of lace. A deeper shade of sadness than usual rested on her brow. She looked at no one in the apartment, but from time to time her melancholy gaze wandered over the portraits of the kings of Europe which ornamented the gallery, at the head of whom were those of her ancestors, the kings of France.

The black dress which she wore was the usual travelling costume of princesses. It concealed large pockets, still worn as in the times of the good housewife-like queens, and the Princess Louise, imitating them in that also, had the numerous keys of her chests and wardrobes suspended at her waist by a gold chain.

The king's face assumed a very serious expression when he saw how silent all in the gallery were, and how attentively they awaited the result of the interview between him and his daughter. But the gallery was so long that the spectators at either end might see, but they could not hear what passed—they had a right to see—it was their duty not to hear.

The princess advanced a few steps to meet the king, and taking his hand, she kissed it respectfully.

"They tell me you are setting out on a journey, madame," said he; "are you going into Picardy?"

"No, sire," she replied.

"Then, I presume," said he, in a louder voice, "that you are about to make a pilgrimage to Noirmontiers?"

"No, sire. I am going to retire to the convent of the Carmelites at St. Denis, of which you know I have the right to be abbess."

The king started, but he preserved his countenance unmoved, although in reality his heart was troubled.

"Oh, no—no! my daughter!" he said, "you will not leave me. It is impossible you can leave me!"

"My dear father, it is long since I decided on abandoning the world—your majesty permitted me to make that decision—do not now, I entreat you, my dear father, oppose my wishes."

"Yes, certainly, you wrung from me the permission of which you speak. I gave it, but still hoped that when the moment of departure came your heart would fail you. You ought not to bury yourself in a cloister—by acting so, you forget what is due to your rank—it is grief or want of fortune which makes the convent be sought as a refuge. The daughter of the King of France is certainly not poor; and, if she be unhappy, the world ought not to know it."

The king's thoughts and even his language seemed to become more elevated as he entered more and more into the part he was called on to play—that of a king and a father. This is, indeed, a part never played ill, when pride and regret inspire the actor.

"Sire," replied the princess, perceiving her father's emotion, and fearful that it might affect her more deeply than she desired at that moment, "Sire, do not by your tenderness for me weaken my resolution—my grief is no vulgar grief—therefore, my resolution to retire from the world is not in accordance with the usual customs of our day."

"Your grief?" exclaimed the king, as if from a real impulse of feeling. "Have you, then, sorrows, my poor child?"

"Heavy, heavy sorrows, sire!"

"Why did you not confide them to me, my dearest daughter?"

"Because they are sorrows not to be assuaged by any mortal hand."

"Not by that of a king?"

"Ah, no, sire!"

"Not by a father's hand?"

"No, sire, no!"

"But you are religious, Louise; does not religion give you strength?"

"Not sufficient strength yet, sire; therefore, I retire to a cloister in order to obtain more. In silence God speaks to the heart of man—in solitude man communes with God."

"But, in acting thus, you are making a sacrifice for which nothing can compensate. The throne of France casts a majestic shadow over the children of its kings—ought not this reflected greatness to be sufficient for you?"

"The shadow of the cell is better, sire—it refreshes the weary spirit—it soothes the strong as well as the weak—the humble as well as the proud—the high as well as the low."

"Do you fear any danger by remaining? In that case, Louise, cannot the king defend you?"

"Sire, may God, in the first place, defend the king!"

"I repeat, Louise, that mistaken zeal leads you astray. It is good to pray, but not to pray always; and you—so good, so pious!—can you require such constant prayer?"

"Oh, my father! never can I offer up prayers enough to avert from us the woes which threaten us. If God has given me a portion of goodness—if for twenty years my only effort has been to purify my soul, I fear, alas! that I am yet far from having attained the goodness and the purity necessary for an expiatory sacrifice."

The king started back and gazed at the princess with surprise. "Never have I heard you speak thus before, my dear child," said he; "your ascetic life is making your reason wander."

"Oh, sire, do not speak thus of a devotion the truest that ever subject offered to a king, or daughter to a father, in a time of need. Sire, that throne, of which you but now so proudly spoke as lending a protecting shade to your children—that throne totters. You feel not the blows which are dealt at its foundations, but I have seen them. Silently a deep abyss is preparing, which will engulf the monarchy! Sire, has any one ever told you the truth?"

The princess looked around to discover whether the attendants were far enough to be out of hearing of her words, then she resumed:

"Well, sire, I know the truth! Too often have I heard the groans which the wretched send forth, when, as a Sister of Mercy, I visited the dark narrow streets, the filthy lanes, the dismal garrets of the poor. In those streets, those lanes, those garrets, I have seen human beings dying of cold and hunger in winter, of heat and thirst in summer. You see not, sire, what the country is—you, who go merely from Versailles to Marly, and from Marly to Versailles. But in the country there is not grain—I do not say to feed the people, but even to sow for a new harvest—for the land, cursed by some adverse power, has received, but has given nothing back. The people, wanting bread, are filled with discontent. The air is filled in the twilight and at night with voices telling them of weapons, of chains,

of prisons, of tyranny; and at these voices they awake, cease to complain, and commence to threaten. The parliaments demand the right of remonstrance—that is, the right to say to you openly what they whisper in private—'King, you are ruining the kingdom—save it!—or we shall save it ourselves.' The soldiers, with their idle swords, furrow the land in which the philosophers have scattered the seeds of liberty. Men now see things which they formerly saw not, for our writers have laid all open to them—they know all that we do, and frown whenever their *masters* pass by. Your majesty's successor is soon to be married. When Anne of Austria's son was married, the city of Paris made presents to the new queen; now, it is not only silent, and offers nothing, but you have been obliged to use force to collect the taxes to pay the expense of bringing the daughter of Cæsar to the palace of the son of St. Louis. The clergy had long ceased to pray to God; but, seeing the lands given away, privileges exhausted, coffers empty, they have begun again to pray for what they call the happiness of the people. And then, sire, must I tell you what you know so well—what you have seen with so much bitterness, although you have spoken of it to none? The kings, your brothers, who formerly envied us, now turn away from us. Your four daughters, sire, princesses of France, have not found husbands, and there are twenty princes in Germany, three in England, sixteen in the States of the North, without naming our relations, the Bourbons of Spain and Naples, who forget us, or turn away from us like the others. Perhaps the Turk would have taken us, had we not been daughters of his most Christian majesty. Not for myself, my father, do I care for this, or complain of it. Mine is a happy state, since it leaves me free; since I am not necessary to any one of my family, and may retire from the world—in meditation and in poverty may pray to God to avert from your head, and from my nephew's, the awful storm I see gathering on the horizon of the future."

"My child! my daughter! it is your fears which make the future appear so dreadful."

"Sire, sire, remember that princess of antiquity, that royal prophetess! She foretold to her father and to her brothers war, destruction, conflagration, and her predictions were laughed at—they called her mad! Do not treat me as she was treated! Take care, oh, my father!—reflect, my king!"

Louis XV. folded his arms, and his head sank on his bosom. "My daughter," said he, "you speak very severely. Are those woes which you denounce caused by me?"

"God forbid that I should think so! They are the fruit of the times in which we live. You are whirled on in the career of events as we are all. Only listen, sire, to the applause in the theatre which follows any allusion against royalty. See, in the evenings, what joyous crowds descend the narrow stairs of the galleries, while the grand marble staircase is deserted, Sire, both the people and the courtiers have made for themselves pleasures quite apart from our pleasures. They amuse themselves without us; or rather, when we appear in the midst of their pleasures, they become dull. Alas!" continued the princess, her eyes swimming with tears—"alas! poor young men, affectionate young women!—love, sing, forget, be happy! Here, when I went amongst you, I only disturbed your happiness. Yonder, in my cloister, I shall serve you! Here, you hid your glad smiles in my presence, for fear of displeasing me. There, I shall pray—oh, God! with all my soul—for my king, for my sisters, for my nephews, for the people of France—for all whom I love with the energy of a heart which no earthly passion has exhausted."

"My daughter," said the king, after a melancholy silence, "I entreat you not to leave me—not at this moment, at least; you will break my heart!"

The princess seized his hand, and, fixing her eyes full of love on his noble features—"No!" said she, "no, my father—not another hour in this palace! No, it is time for me to pray: I feel in myself strength to redeem, by my tears, those pleasures for which you sigh—you, who are yet young. You are the kindest of fathers, you are ever ready to pardon!"

"Stay with us, Louise!—stay with us!" said the king, pressing her to his heart.

The princess shook her head. "My kingdom is not of this world!" said she, disengaging herself from her father's embrace. "Farewell, my father!—I have told you to-day what, for ten years, has laid heavy on my heart. The burden became too great. Farewell! I am satisfied—see, I can smile; I am now, at length, happy—I regret nothing!"

"Not even me, my daughter?"

"Ah, I should regret you, were I never to see you again; but you will sometimes come to St. Denis? You will not quite forget your child?"

"Oh, never, never!"

"Do not, my dear father, allow yourself to be affected. Let it not appear that this separation is to be a lasting one. My sisters, I believe, know nothing of it yet; my women alone have been my confidants. For eight days I have been making all my preparations; and I wish that the report of my departure should only be spread when the great doors of St. Denis shall have closed on me; their heavy sound will prevent me from hearing any other."

The king read in his daughter's eyes that her resolution was irrevocable. He wished, therefore, that she should go without disturbance. If she feared that sobs might shake her resolution, he feared them still more for his nerves. Besides, he wished to go to Marly that day, and too much grief at Versailles might have obliged him to put off his journey. He reflected, also, that when issuing from some orgies unfit both for a king and a father, he should never more meet that grave, sad face, which seemed always to reproach him for the careless, worthless existence which he led; and this thought was not disagreeable to him.

"Be it, then, as you wish, my child," said he; "but, at least, receive, before you go, the blessing of a father whom you have always made perfectly happy."

"Give me your hand only, sire, and let me kiss it. Bestow your precious blessing on me in thought."

To those who knew the decision of the princess, it was a solemn spectacle to see her at every step she made advancing, yet in life, to the tombs of her ancestors—those ancestors who, from their golden frames, seemed to thank her that she hastened to rejoin them.

At the door of the gallery the king bowed, and returned without uttering a word. The court, according to etiquette, followed him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LOQUE, CHIFFE, AND GRAILLE.

THE king passed on to what was called the Cabinet of the Equipages. It was there that he was accustomed, before going to hunt or to drive out, to pass a few minutes in giving particular orders concerning the vehicles and attendants he should require during the rest of the day.

At the door of the gallery he bowed to the courtiers, and, by a wave of his hand, indicated that he wished to be alone. When they had left him, he passed through the cabinet to a corridor which led to the apartments of the princesses. Having reached the door, before which hung a curtain, he stopped for a moment, shook his head, and muttered between his teeth :

"There was but one of them good, and she is gone !"

This very flattering speech for those who remained was answered by a shrill chorus of voices ; the curtain was raised, and the furious trio saluted their father with cries of "Thank you, father, thank you !"

"Ha, Loque !" said he, addressing the eldest of them, the Princess Adelaide, "you heard what I said—so much the worse for you. Be angry or not, just as you like—I only spoke the truth."

"Yes," said the Princess Victoire, "you tell us nothing new, sire. We always knew that you preferred Louise to us."

"In faith, quite true, Chiffe."

"And why do you prefer Louise," asked the Princess Sophie, in a sharp voice.

"Because Louise never gave me any trouble," replied the king, showing that good-humoured frankness of which, when he was perfectly pleased, Louis XV. was so complete a type.

"Oh, but she will give you trouble yet, rest assured !" replied the Princess Sophie, with such a peculiar emphasis that it drew the attention of the king more particularly to her. "I should be rather surprised if she did not, for she is not very fond of you."

"And pray, what do you know about her, Graille ?" said he. "Did Louise, before going away, make you her confidant ?"

"I can say most truly," answered the princess, "that I return her affection with interest."

"Oh, very well ! Hate one another—detest one another as much as you choose ; I am perfectly content : only do not summon me to restore order in the kingdom of the amazons. However, I should like to know how poor Louise is to give me trouble."

"Poor Louise !" repeated the three princesses, making different grimaces at the words. "You wish to know how she will give you trouble ? Well, I shall tell you," said the Princess Sophie.

The king stretched himself in a large easy-chair, placed near the door, so that he could at any moment make his escape.

"Louise is retiring to a convent, because she wishes to carry on some experiments which she cannot make so well in the palace."

"Come, come !" said the king, "no insinuations against the virtue of your sister. No one beyond these walls has ever dared to sully that, though many things are said of you for which it were well there were no grounds. Do not *you* begin this subject !"

"I ?"

"Yes, *you* !"

"Oh, I was not going to attack Louise's virtue," said the Princess Sophie, very much hurt by the peculiar accent her father had given to the *you*, and by the marked repetition of it ; "I only said she was going to make experiments."

"Well, and if she does make experiments in chemistry, if she does make fire-arms, and wheels for chairs, if she does play on the flute, the drum, or the harpsichord, or even the violin—what harm would there be in it ?"

"The experiments to which I alluded were experiments in politics."

The king started—the princess went on.

"She is going to study philosophy and theology. She will continue the commentaries on the bull *Unigenitus*—indeed, we must seem very useless beings when compared with her—a lady who writes theories concerning governments, systems of metaphysics, and theology!"

"And if these pursuits lead your sister to heaven, what harm can you see in them?" said the king, struck, however, with the connection there was between what the Princess Sophie was saying, and the manner of the Princess Louise's departure, accompanied as it had been by a political exhortation. "If you envy her happiness you are very bad Christians."

"No, on my honour!" said the Princess Victoire, "she has my full permission to go, but I shall take care not to follow her."

"Nor I!" responded the Princess Adelaide.

"Nor I!" said the Princess Sophie.

"Besides, she always detested us," said the first.

"You all?" the king asked.

"Yes, detested us all," they replied.

"Oh, then, I see," he said, "poor Louise has chosen to go to heaven that she may not meet any of her family again!"

This sarcasm made the three sisters laugh, but rather constrainedly, and Adelaide, the eldest, brought all her wit into play in order to deal her father a more weighty blow than he had given them.

"Ladies," said she, with the sneering tone which was peculiar to her when roused from that habitual indolence which had procured for her the name of Loque, "you have either not found out, or you do not dare to tell the king, the real cause of Louise's departure!"

"Come, Loque—come! you have got some wicked tale to tell, I see. Let us hear it!"

"Sire, I fear it might vex you a little."

"No, no—say you hope it will vex me, that would be nearer the truth."

Madame Adelaide bit her lips. "Then I shall tell you the truth, sire."

"Very fine! If you ever do tell the truth, cure yourself of the habit. The habit? Do I ever tell it? and yet you see I am not the worse for it, heaven be praised!" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Speak, sister, speak," said the other two sisters, impatient to hear anything that might wound their father.

"Sweet little creatures!" growled the king; "see how they love their father!"

But he consoled himself by thinking that he returned their love in kind.

"Well," continued the Princess Adelaide, "what Louise dreaded most—for she was very precise on the score of etiquette—was——"

"Was what?" exclaimed the king; "come, finish, since you have gone so far!"

"It was, sire, then, the intrusion of new faces at court."

"Do you say intrusion?" asked he, by no means pleased with this beginning, for he saw to what it tended. "Intrusion? Are there intruders, then, in my palace? Am I forced to receive persons against my will?"

By this adroit turn he hoped to change the course of the conversation. But the Princess Adelaide felt herself on the right scent, and she was too cunning and too malicious to lose it, when she had so good an end in view as the annoyance of her father.

"Perhaps I was not quite correct—perhaps I used the wrong word—instead of intrusion I should have said introduction."

"Oh, ah!" said the king, "that is an improvement—the other word was a disagreeable one, I confess—I like introduction better."

"And yet," continued the princess, "that is not the right word either."

"What is it, then?"

"It is presentation."

"Yes," cried the other sisters, "yes, you have found the right word now."

The king bit his lip. "Oh, do you think so?" said he.

"Yes," replied the Princess Adelaide, "my sister was very much afraid of new presentations."

"Well?" said the king, feeling what must come, and thinking it best to have done with it as speedily as possible, "well? go on!"

"Well, sire, she was consequently afraid of seeing the Countess Dubarry presented at court."

"Ha!" cried the king, with a burst of passion which he could not repress; "so you have been all this time getting this out! Mordieu! Madame Tell-truth, how you beat about the bush!"

"Sire," replied the princess, "if I have so long delayed in telling your majesty this, it is because respect closed my lips, and I should not have opened them but by your own command."

"Yes, yes; you would never have opened them, I suppose, to yawn, or to speak, or to bite!"

"I am quite certain, however, sire, that I have discovered the real motive which has made my sister retire into a convent."

"Well!—you are wrong!"

"Oh, sire!" they all three repeated, shaking their heads, "oh, sire! we are quite certain of what we say."

"Pshaw! You are all of a tale, I see. There is a conspiracy in my family. This is the reason the presentation cannot take place—this is the reason the princesses can never be seen when persons wish to visit them—that they give no answers to petitions, or requests for an audience."

"What petitions? What requests for an audience?" asked the Princess Adelaide.

"Oh, you know," replied the Princess Sophie, "the petitions of Mademoiselle Jeanne Vaubernier." (This was the Countess Dubarry's name in the days of her poverty.)

"Yes," added the Princess Victoire, "the requests for an audience of Mademoiselle Lange." (Another name which she had borne.)

The king started up, furious with passion; his eye, generally calm and mild, now flashed in a manner rather alarming for the three sisters, and as none of this royal trio of heroines seemed couragious enough to bear the paternal wrath, they bent their heads before the storm.

"And now," cried he, "was I wrong when I said the best had left me?"

"Sire," said the Princess Adelaide, "you treat us very ill—worse than you treat your dogs!"

"And justly, too. My dogs, when I go near them, receive me kindly—caress me—they are real friends. So, adieu, ladies! I shall go to Charlotte, Bellefille, and Gredinet. Poor animals! Yes, I love them! And I love them more particularly because they do not bark out the truth."

The king left the apartment in a rage; but had not taken three steps in the ante-room, when he heard his daughters singing in chorus the first verse of a ballad ridiculing the Countess Dubarry, which was then sung through the streets of Paris.

He was about to return—and perhaps the princesses would not have fared well had he done so—but he restrained himself, and went on, calling loudly, that he might not hear them, "Hola! the captain of the greyhounds! the captain of the greyhounds!"

The officer who bore this singular title hurried forward,

"Let the dogs be loosed!"

"Oh, sire," cried the officer, placing himself in the king's way, "do not advance another step!"

"What now? what now?" said the king, stopping before a door, from under which was heard the snuffing of dogs, aware that their master was near.

"Sire," said the officer, "pardon me, but I cannot permit your majesty to enter here."

"Oh, I understand—the kennel is out of order. Well, then, let Gredinet be brought out."

"Sire," continued the officer, with alarm depicted on his face, "Gredinet has neither eaten nor drunk for two days, and it is feared he is mad."

"Oh," cried the king, "I am really the most wretched of men! Gredinet mad! This alone was wanting to complete my vexation!"

The officer of the greyhounds thought it his duty to shed a tear to make the scene more perfect. The king turned on his heel, and retired to his private cabinet, where his valet was waiting. He, seeing the king's face so disturbed, hid himself in the recess of a window—and the king, looking upon him rather as a piece of furniture than a man, strode up and down his room talking to himself.

"Yes, I see it—I see it plainly," said he; "the Duke de Choiseul laughs at me—the dauphin looks upon himself as already half master, and thinks he will be wholly so when he has his little Austrian beside him on the throne. Louise loves me—but so sternly, that she preaches me a sermon and leaves me. My three other daughters sing songs, in which I am ridiculed under the name of Blaise. My grandson, the Count de Provence, translates Lucretius; and his brother, the Count d'Artois, is a dissipated scapegrace. My dogs go mad, and would bite me. Decidedly, there is only the poor countess who loves me. To the devil, then, with those who would annoy her!"

Then, with a sort of settled despair, he seated himself at that table on which Louis XIV. wrote his proudest letters and signed his latest treaties.

"I know now," continued he, "why every one wishes to hasten the arrival of the dauphiness. They think when she shows herself, I shall become her slave, and be governed by her family. I' faith, I shall see her soon enough, that dear daughter-in-law of mine, particularly if her arrival is to be the signal for new troubles. Let me be quiet as long as I can, and for that purpose, the longer she is delayed on the road the better. She was to have passed through Rheims and Noyon without stopping, and to come immediately to Compiègne. I shall insist on the first arrangement. Three days at Rheims—and one—no, faith—two! Bah! *three* days at Noyon! That would be six days I should gain—yes, six good days!"

He took a pen, and wrote in person an order to the Count de Stainville to stop three days at Rheims and three days at Noyon.

Then, sending for a courier, "Don't draw bridle," said he, "until you have delivered this according to its address."

Then with the same pen he wrote:

"DEAR COUNTESS,

"To-day we instal Zamore in his government. I am just setting out for Marly. This evening, at Luciennes, I shall tell you all I now think.

"FRANCE."

"Here, Lebel," said he to the valet, "take this letter to the countess, and keep on good terms with her—I advise you."

The valet bowed and left the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COUNTESS DE BEARN.

THE principal object of all the fury of the court, and their stumbling-block on this dreaded occasion—the Countess de Bearn—was, as Chon said, travelling rapidly to Paris. Her journey thither was the result of one of those bright ideas which sometimes came to Viscount Jean's assistance in his times of trouble.

Not being able to find among the ladies of the court one who would present the Countess Dubarry, and since she could not be presented without a lady to introduce her, he cast his eye on the provinces. He examined country-seats—searched carefully in the towns—and at last found what he wanted on the banks of the Meuse, in an old gothic-looking country-seat, but one kept in good order.

Now, what he wanted was an old lady fond of law, and having a lawsuit on hand. The old lady with the lawsuit was the Countess de Bearn.

The lawsuit was an affair on which all her fortune depended, and which was to be heard before Monsieur de Maupeou, who had lately taken up the cause of the Countess Dubarry, having discovered—what had remained hidden until then—that he was related to her, and now called her cousin. Looking forward to the appointment of Lord Chancellor through her interest, he showed the king's favourite all the warmth of a friendship naturally arising from such a substantial basis. This friendship and this interest had procured for him from the king the office of vice-chancellor, and from the world in general the pithy denomination of *the vice*.

The Countess de Bearn was a thin, angular, agile little woman, always on the alert, always rolling her eyes like those of a frightened cat, from under her grey eyebrows. She still wore the dress which had been fashionable in her youth, and as the capricious goddess of fashion has sensible fits now and then, it so happened that the costume of the young girl of 1740 should be precisely that of the old woman of 1770.

Broad guipure, pointed mantelet, an enormous coif, an immense bag, and a neck-handkerchief of flowered silk—such was the costume in which Chon, the well-beloved sister and confidant of the Countess Dubarry, found the Countess de Bearn arrayed, when she presented herself before her as Mademoiselle Flageot, the daughter of the lawyer in Paris who had the management of her suit. The old countess wore the costume of her early days as much from taste as from economy. She was not one of those persons who blush for their poverty, because her poverty had not been caused by her own fault. She regretted, indeed, not being rich for her son's sake, to whom she would have wished to leave a fortune worthy of his name. The young man was thoroughly country-bred, timid to a fault, caring much more for what belonged to the substantial things of life than to the honours of renown.

The countess's sole consolation was in calling the lands which were contested with the Saluce family "my estate;" but as she was a woman of sense, she felt that if she wanted to borrow money on that estate, not a usurer in France—and there were some bold enough in running risks at that period—would lend it her; not an attorney—and there were some not

very scrupulous then, as there have been at all times—would procure her the smallest sum on such a guarantee.

Forced, then, to live on the annual rents of those lands that were not disputed, the Countess de Bearn, having only one thousand crowns a year, kept very far from court; for there she must have spent nearly twelve livres a day in the hire of a carriage to take her to her lawyer's and to the judge's. She was still more determined in keeping aloof, since she had despaired of her cause being heard for four or five years at least. Lawsuits, even in the present day, are, in truth, tedious affairs; but still, without living to the age of the patriarchs, a person who commences one has some hope of seeing it to an end; but, formerly, a suit extended through two or three generations, and was like those fabulous plants of the Arabian tales, which blossomed only at the end of two or three centuries.

The Countess de Bearn, therefore, did not wish to lose the remains of her patrimony in recovering the ten-twelfths of it which were disputed. She was what is always called "a woman of the old school," sagacious, prudent, firm, avaricious. She could certainly have managed her suit much better herself than any advocate, lawyer, or attorney; but she was called Bearn, and that name prevented her from doing many things which economy might have prompted. Like the divine Achilles in his tent, suffering a thousand deaths when he heard the trumpet, although feigning to be deaf to it, she, in her retirement, was devoured by regret and anguish. She passed her days in deciphering old parchments, her spectacles on her nose; and at night, on her pillow, she pleaded with such eloquence the cause of the estate claimed by the Salices, that she was always successful—a termination of the affair which she could but wish her advocate to arrive at.

It may readily be imagined that in such a temper of mind, the arrival of Chon and the news she brought were very agreeable to Madame de Bearn.

The young count was with his regiment.

We always believe what we wish to believe; so Madame de Bearn was very easily caught by the young lady's tale.

There was, however, a shadow of suspicion in the countess's mind. She had known Master Flageot twenty years, and had visited him two hundred times in his narrow, dark street; but she had never seen a child playing on the square bit of carpet which looked so little on the floor of his large office, and had there been children there, they would surely have found their way into it to get a toy or a cake from the clients.

But what was the use of thinking about the lawyer and his office, and his carpet? What was the use of trying to remember anything about it? Flageot's daughter was Flageot's daughter—and there she was! Moreover, she was married, and—what banished the last shadow of suspicion—she had not come on purpose to Verdun, she was going to join her husband at Strasbourg.

Perhaps the countess ought to have asked Mademoiselle Flageot for a letter from her father, to assure herself of her identity; but if a father could not send his own child without a letter, to whom could he entrust a confidential mission?—Then why such fears? What could cause such suspicions? Why should any one travel sixty leagues to tell her a tale without any foundation on fact?

If she had been rich, a banker's or a financier's wife, taking with her carriages, plate and diamonds, she might have thought it was a plot got up by robbers. But she laughed to herself when she thought what a dis-

appointment any robbers would experience who should be so ill-advised as to attack her.

So Chon having disappeared with her plain dark dress, and her shabby little one-horse chaise which she had taken at the last post, leaving her carriage behind her, the countess, convinced that the time was come for her to make a sacrifice, got into her old coach, and urged on the postilions so well, that she passed through Lachaussée an hour before the dauphiness, and reached the gate of Saint-Denis five or six hours after Chon herself.

As she had little luggage, and as the most important thing for her was to receive information from her lawyer, she ordered her coach to drive to the Rue du Petit-Lion, and stop before Master Flageot's door. The vehicle, we may be assured, did not stop there without attracting a great number of curious spectators—and the Parisians are all curious—who stared at the venerable machine which seemed to have issued from the coach-house of Henry IV.—so antique was it in its solidity, its monumental form, and its scalloped leather curtains, which ran with a disagreeable creaking on a copper rod, covered with verdigris.

The Rue du Petit-Lion was not wide, and the countess's equipage filled it up very majestically. Having alighted and paid the postilions, she ordered them to take it to the inn where she usually stopped—*Le Coq Chantant*, in the Rue Saint-Germain-des-Près.

She ascended Monsieur Flageot's dark stairs, holding by the greasy cord which served instead of a hand-rail. The staircase was cool, and it refreshed the old lady, who was tired by her long and rapid journey. When Margaret, his servant, announced the Countess de Bearn, Master Flageot pulled up his stockings, which he had allowed to fall nearly to his ankles on account of the heat, with one hand, fixed on his wig with the other, then hastily threw on a dimity dressing-gown, and, so adorned, advanced smiling to the door. In this smile, however, there was such an expression of surprise, that the countess could not help saying, "Well, well! my dear sir, it is I."

"Yes, indeed," replied he, "I see plainly enough, madame, that it is you!"

Then, modestly wrapping his dressing-gown round him, he led the countess to a large leathern arm-chair, in the lightest corner of the apartment, carefully putting aside the papers which covered his desk, for he knew the old lady to be curious in the extreme.

"And now, madame," said Master Flageot, gallantly, "permit me to express my pleasure at this agreeable surprise."

The countess had leaned back in her chair, and raised her feet from the floor to allow Margaret to slip between it and her brocaded satin shoes a leather cushion; but at this phrase she started up hastily. "How?" exclaimed she, drawing her spectacles from their case, and putting them on, so that she might see his face the better—"surprise?"

"Most assuredly, I thought you at your estates, madame," replied the lawyer, adroitly flattering the old lady by bestowing this title on the countess's three acres of kitchen-garden.

"Well, I was there; but, on the first intimation from you, I left them."

"Intimation from me?" said the astonished advocate.

"Yes, at your first word, or counsel, or advice, or whatever you please to call it."

Flageot's eyes looked as large as the countess's glasses.

"I have been very expeditious," continued she, "and I hope you are satisfied."

"I am delighted to see you, madame, as I always am ; but allow me to say, that I do not see how I have been the cause of your visit."

"Not the cause? Most certainly you have been the entire cause of it!"

"I?"

"Yes, you, undoubtedly. Well, have you no news to tell me?"

"Oh, yes, madame ; it is said the king is meditating some great stroke of policy with regard to the parliament. But may I offer you some refreshment?"

"But what does it matter to me about the king and his strokes of policy?"

"About what, then, did you inquire, madame?"

"About my suit, of course. Is there anything new about it?"

"Oh, as to that," said Flageot, shaking his head sorrowfully, "nothing, absolutely nothing!"

"That is to say, nothing——"

"No—nothing, madame."

"You mean nothing since your daughter spoke to me about it ; but as that was only the day before yesterday, I can readily understand that there may not be much new since then."

"My daughter, madame?"

"Yes."

"Did you say my daughter?"

"Yes, your daughter, whom you sent to me."

"Pardon me, madame ; but it is quite impossible that I could send my daughter to you."

"Impossible?"

"Yes, for a very simple reason—I have no daughter."

"Are you sure?" asked the countess.

"Madame," replied Flageot, "I have the honour to be a bachelor."

"Come, come!" said the countess, as if she supposed him jesting.

M. Flageot became uneasy ; he called Margaret to bring in some refreshment, but, more particularly, that she might watch the countess. "Poor woman!" said he to himself, "her head is turned."

"What," said she, returning to the charge, "you have not a daughter?"

"No, madame."

"Not one married at Strasbourg?"

"No, madame, by no means."

"And you did not send that daughter," pursued the countess, "on her way thither, to tell me that my suit was called on?"

"Nothing of the kind, madame."

The countess started from her chair, and clasped her hands.

"Drink a little of something, madame ; it will do you good," said M. Flageot, and at the same time he made a sign to Margaret to bring a tray, on which were two glasses of beer. But the old lady was not thinking of her thirst, and she pushed away the tray so rudely that Dame Margaret, who appeared to be a privileged sort of person, was affronted.

"But let us understand each other," said the countess, eyeing Master Flageot over her spectacles, "explain all this, if you please."

"Certainly, madame, Margaret, you need not go ; the countess wll perhaps drink something presently. Let us explain."

"Yes, let us explain ; for, upon my honour, my dear sir, you are quite incomprehensible to-day. I begin to think the hot weather has turned your brain."

"Do not be angry, dear madame," said Flageot, manœuvring with the

hind-feet of his chair, so that he got by degrees farther from the countess, "Do not get angry, and let us talk over the matter quietly."

"Yes, yes, certainly. You say you have not a daughter?"

"No, madame, I have not one, and I regret it deeply, since it appears you would be pleased that I had, although——"

"Although what?" repeated the countess.

"Although, for my own part, I should prefer a son. Boys succeed better in the world, or rather, don't turn out so ill as girls in the present day."

The countess looked more and more alarmed.

"What!" said she, "have you not sent for me to Paris by a sister, a niece, a cousin—by some person, in short?"

"I never thought of such a thing, madame, knowing how expensive it is staying in Paris."

"But my suit?"

"I should always have taken care to let you know in time, before the pleading came on."

"Before it came on?"

"Yes."

"Has it not come on, then?"

"Not that I know of, madame."

"It has not been called?"

"No."

"And it is not likely to come on soon?"

"Oh no, madame, certainly not."

"Then," cried the old lady, rising, "I have been tricked!—I have been most basely deceived!"

Flageot pushed back his wig, muttering, "I fear it, indeed, madame."

"Master Flageot!" cried the countess.

The lawyer started on his seat, and made a sign to Margaret to keep near, in order to defend him.

"Master Flageot," continued the countess, "I will not submit to such an indignity as this; I will address the minister of police, to discover the impudent creature who insulted me thus!'

"Oh," said Flageot, "it is a very doubtful affair."

"And when she is found," continued the countess, almost speechless with anger, "I shall bring an action against her."

"Another lawsuit!" said the lawyer, sorrowfully.

These words made the poor lady fall from the height of her passion, and a heavy fall it was.

"Alas," said she, "I came here so happy!"

"But what did that woman say to you, madame?"

"First, that she was sent by you."

"Shocking intriguer!"

"That you desired her to say that the trial was coming on—was very near—that I could scarcely be in time with all the speed I could make."

"Alas! madame," repeated Flageot, in his turn, "the trial is very far from coming on."

"Yes, so far from it, I suppose, that it is quite forgotten."

"Forgotten!—sunk, buried, madame; and unless a miracle were to happen—and you know miracles are very rare nowadays——"

"Oh, yes!" murmured the countess, with a sigh.

M. Flageot replied by another sigh, a faithful echo of the countess's.

"Well, sir, one thing is certain," added she.

"What is it, madame?"

"I shall not survive this."

"Oh, don't say so! you would be quite wrong."

"Oh, heaven!—oh, heaven!" exclaimed the poor countess; "my strength is completely exhausted."

"Courage, madame, courage!" said Flageot.

"But have you no advice to give me?—none?"

"Oh, yes!—my advice is to return to your estates, and after this never believe anybody who does not bring you a letter from me, in my own hand."

"I must return, indeed."

"It will be the wisest plan."

"Well, sir," said the countess, with a groan, "believe me, we shall never meet again—at least, not in this world."

"What an infamous affair!"

"I must have some very cruel enemies."

"It has been a trick of the opposite party, I would swear!"

"It is a very mean trick, I must say."

"A mean, sorry trick, indeed!"

"Justice!—justice!" cried the countess, "my dear sir, she is the cave of Cacus!"

"And why is it?" he replied; "because justice is not what it was—because the parliament is opposed—because Monsieur de Maupeou must be chancellor, forsooth, instead of remaining what he ought to be, president."

"M. Flageot, I think I could drink something now."

"Margaret!" cried the lawyer—for Margaret had left the room, seeing the peaceable turn affairs were taking. She now entered with the tray and the two glasses which she had carried away. The countess drank her glass of beer very slowly, after having touched the lawyer's glass with hers, then she gained the ante-room, after a sad and solemn curtsey and a still more sorrowful leave-taking.

The lawyer followed her, his wig in his hand. She was in the lobby, and was reaching out her hand for the cord to aid her in her descent, when a hand was laid on hers, and a head gave her a thump on the chest. The head and the hand were those of a clerk, who was mounting the stairs four steps at a time.

The old lady, muttering and grumbling, arranged her petticoats and continued on her way, whilst the clerk, having reached the lobby, pushed open the lawyer's door, and with the open and joyous voice for which the clerks of the parliament were noted, cried out, "Here, Master Flageot!—here!—it is about the Bearn business;" and he held out a paper.

To rush up the stairs at that name—push by the clerk—to throw herself on Flageot—to snatch the paper from him—to shut herself up with him in his office—all this was effected by the countess before the clerk had recovered from two boxes on the ear which Margaret bestowed, or seemed to bestow on him, in return for two kisses.

"Well!" cried the old lady, "what is it? Master Flageot—what is it?"

"Faith, I can't tell, madame; but if you will give me back the paper, I shall let you know."

"True, true, my good Master Flageot! Read it—read it!"

He looked at the signature.

"It is from Guildon, our attorney," said he.

"Good Heavens!"

"He desires me," continued Flageot, with surprise amounting almost to bewilderment—"he desires me to be ready to plead on Tuesday, for your affair is to come on!"

"To come on?" cried the countess; "take care, Master Flageot, take care!—no more tricks—I should never recover from another."

"Madame," replied Flageot, still bewildered at the intelligence, "if there be any trick, any jest in this, Guildon is the author of it; and it is certainly the first time in his life that he has jested."

"But are you certain the letter is from him?"

"It is signed Guildon—see!"

"I see it is. To be called this morning and pleaded on Tuesday. Well, then, you see, my dear sir, the lady who came to me was not a cheat."

"It appears not."

"Then, since she was not sent by you—but are you sure she was not?"

"Pardieu!—am I sure of it?"

"By whom was she sent, then?"

"Yes, by whom?"

"For she must have been sent by some one."

"It is a complete riddle to me."

"And to me also. Let me read the paper again. Yes, my dear Master Flageot, the pleading is to come on—it is written so—and before the president, Maupeou."

"The devil!—is that there?"

"Yes, certainly."

"That is vexatious."

"How so?"

"Because M. Maupeou is a great friend of your opponents."

"You know that!"

"He is always with them."

"Ha!—I am truly unfortunate! Now we are more embarrassed than ever!"

"But, for all that," said the lawyer, "you must wait on him."

"He will receive me very badly!"

"That is probable."

"Oh, Master Flageot, what do you tell me?"

"The truth, madam."

"What! you not only lose courage yourself, but you try to deprive me of mine?"

"With the Chancellor Maupeou you must not hope for anything favourable."

"You, so timid!—you, a Cicero!"

"Cicero would have lost the cause of Ligarius had he pleaded before Verres instead of Cæsar," replied Master Flageot, finding nothing more humble to say in return for the high compliment of his client.

"Then you advise me not to wait on him?"

"Heaven forbid, madame, I should advise anything so irregular; but I pity you sincerely for having to undergo such an interview."

"You really speak like a soldier who meant to desert his post. One would think you feared to undertake the business."

"Madame," replied the lawyer, "I have lost causes which seemed much more likely to be gained by me than this of yours does."

The countess sighed, but summoning all her energy, she said, with a

kind of dignity which made a complete contrast to all that had been comic in the scene, "I shall carry the matter through—it shall not be said that having right on my side I gave way before a cabal. I shall lose my cause, but I shall, at least, act as a woman of rank and character—such as there are few at court in the present day. You will accompany me, will you not, M. Flageot, in my visit to the vice-chancellor?"

"Madame," replied the lawyer, also calling up all his dignity to his aid, "we opposition members of the parliament of Paris have sworn to have no intercourse beyond necessary audiences with those who betrayed the parliament in the affair of Monsieur d'Aiguillon. 'Union is strength,' and as the vice-chancellor tacked about perpetually in that business, we have determined to keep aloof until he shows his real colours."

"My suit is doomed, I see," sighed the countess; "the lawyers quarrel with the judges—the judges with the clients. No matter! I shall persevere to the end!"

"May heaven assist you, madame!" said Flageot, flinging his dressing-gown over his left arm as a Roman senator might have done his toga.

"This is but a poor sort of an advocate," murmured she to herself. "I am afraid I shall have less chance with him before the parliament than I had at home on my pillow;" then aloud, with a smile, under which she strove to hide her uneasiness, "Adieu, M. Flageot, adieu—study the case thoroughly, I entreat you—we know not how things may turn out,"

"Oh, madame," said Master Flageot, "do not fear as to the pleading—I shall do you justice—I shall make some terrible allusions."

"Allusions to what, sir?"

"To the corruption of Jerusalem, madame, which I shall compare to the accursed cities on which the fire of heaven descended. You understand—no one can mistake—by Jerusalem I mean Versailles."

"M. Flageot," exclaimed the old lady, "do not compromise yourself—or rather, do not compromise my cause."

"Oh, madame, with Monsieur de Maupeou for judge, your cause is lost. But then, let the world hear of us; since we cannot obtain justice, let us at least strike terror to the wicked."

"Sir, sir!——"

"Let us be philosophic—let us thunder——"

"Deuce take you, with your thunder!" muttered the countess; "fool of a lawyer—you are thinking only of making a figure with your fag-ends of philosophy. Come, I will go to the vice-chancellor—he at least is no philosopher. I may do better with him than with you, after all."

And the old countess left M. Flageot, having, poor old lady, in two days, mounted all the degrees of the scale of hope, and descended all those in that of disappointment.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE VICE.

THE old countess trembled in every limb as she proceeded towards Monsieur de Maupeou's residence. However, one thought had quieted her a little on the road—it was so late that in all probability she would not be admitted, and she should merely have to tell the porter when she should come again.

In fact, it was about seven in the evening, and although it was still light, the habit of dining at four, which the nobility had adopted, had caused all business to be suspended from dinner until the next day. Although Madame de Bearn anxiously longed to see the chancellor, she was, nevertheless, consoled by the thought that she should not see him. This is one of the frequent contradictions of the human mind which we can always understand but never explain.

The countess presented herself, therefore, quite certain that the porter would refuse her admittance; and had even prepared a crown to offer the Cerberus to induce him to put her name on the list of those who requested an audience. On reaching the house, she found an usher talking to the porter, as if giving him an order. She waited discreetly, that she might not interrupt these two personages; but, on perceiving her in her hackney-coach, the usher withdrew. The porter approached and demanded her name.

"Oh, I know," said she, "that it is not probable I shall have the honour of seeing his excellency."

"No matter, madame," replied the porter; "have the goodness to tell me your name."

"The Countess de Bearn," she replied.

"My lord is at home," answered he.

"What did you say?" asked the countess, almost dumb with astonishment.

"I say that my lord is at home," repeated he.

"But of course he will not receive visitors?"

"He will receive you, madame."

Madame de Bearn got out of the coach, hardly knowing whether she was asleep or awake.

The porter pulled a cord—a bell rang twice. The usher appeared at the top of the steps, and the porter made a sign to the countess to enter.

"You wish to speak to my lord?" asked the usher.

"I wish for that honour, but I scarcely hoped to obtain it."

"Have the goodness to follow me, madame."

"And yet people speak so ill of this chancellor," said the countess to herself, as she went along, following the usher—"yet he has certainly one good quality—he admits persons on business at all hours. A chancellor?—it is strange!"

Yet still she shuddered at the idea that she should find him so much the more stern, so much the more ungracious, because he was assiduous at his duties. M. de Maupeou, buried under a great wig, and dressed in a suit of black velvet, was waiting in his cabinet, with the doors open. The countess on entering, cast a rapid glance around. She saw with surprise that he was alone—that the mirrors reflected no other face than her own and that of the meagre, yellow, busy chancellor.

The usher announced—"Madame the Countess de Bearn." The chancellor rose up stiffly, as if he had no joints, and, by the same movement, leaned his back against the chimneypiece.

The countess made the necessary three curtseys.

Her short complimentary speech which followed the curtseys was rather embarrassed—she did not expect the honour—she did not think that a minister who had so much to do would deprive himself of the hours necessary for recreation, etc., etc.

The chancellor replied that time was, no doubt, as precious to his majesty's subjects as to his majesty's ministers—that, nevertheless, he

admitted there were distinctions to be made as to the importance of the affairs brought before him; consequently, he always gave the greater part of his time to those whose business was most urgent.

Fresh curtseys on the part of the countess, then an embarrassed silence, for compliments were ended, and her request must now be made.

The chancellor waited, stroking his chin.

"My lord," said she, "I have presented myself before you, to explain to you an affair on which my whole fortune depends."

The chancellor bowed, as if to intimate that she should go on.

"My lord," she continued, "you must know that all my property, or rather my son's, is at stake in a suit now pending between us and the family of the Saluces."

The vice-chancellor continued to stroke his chin.

"But your equity is so well known to me, my lord, that although I am aware of your interest in—indeed, I may say your friendship for—the adverse party, I have not hesitated an instant in coming to entreat you to hear me."

The chancellor could not help smiling on hearing himself praised for his equity, a quality for which he was about as famous as Dubois was for the apostolical virtues on which he had been complimented fifty years before.

"You are right, madame," said he, "in saying that I am a friend of your opponents, but you are also right in thinking that, when I accepted the seals, I laid aside all friendship. I shall reply to you, then, without any bias, as becomes the supreme head of justice."

"Heaven bless you, my lord!" cried the old countess.

"I shall examine your affair as a simple jurisconsult," continued the chancellor.

"I thank your lordship—your skill in these matters is well known."

"Your cause comes on soon, I think."

"Next week, my lord!"

"In the mean time, what are your wishes respecting it?"

"That your lordship would look into the documents."

"I have already done so."

"Well," asked the old countess, trembling, "and what do you think of it, my lord?"

"I think that there is not a doubt on the subject."

"Not a doubt of my gaining?"

"No—of your losing."

"Then you think, my lord, I shall lose?"

"Undoubtedly—I shall, therefore, give you one piece of advice."

"What is it?" asked the countess, with a last ray of hope.

"It is—if you have any payments to make, the cause being tried, and sentenced pronounced, to have your funds ready."

"Oh, my lord, we shall be ruined then!"

"Surely you know, madame, that justice never takes into account anything respecting the consequences of her decrees."

"But, my lord, there should be mercy as well as justice."

"And, for fear of justice being influenced by mercy, she is made blind, madame."

"But your lordship will not refuse me your advice?"

"Certainly not—ask it, madame. I am ready."

"Is there no means of entering into an arrangement, by which the sentence might not be so harsh?"

"Do you know any of your judges?"

"Not one of them, my lord."

"That is unfortunate. Messieurs de Saluces, your opponents are connected with three-fourths of the parliament."

The countess shuddered.

"But observe," continued the chancellor, "that that does not alter the main grounds of the question, for a judge does not permit himself to be influenced by private feelings."

This was about as true as that he possessed the virtue of equity, or Dubois the apostolic virtues, but it made the poor countess nearly faint.

"But, after all," continued the chancellor, "the judge having done all that integrity demands, of course leans more to a friend than to a person about whom he is indifferent—that is only just, when it is just—and as it will be just that you should lose your cause, they may in their sentence make the consequences of that loss very unpleasant to you."

"But all that your lordship says is very alarming."

"As far as I am concerned, I shall refrain from saying anything that might have an influence on the minds of others; but, as I am not a judge myself, I may speak to you of the state of affairs."

"Alas, my lord, I suspected one thing!"

The vice-chancellor fixed on her his little grey eyes.

"I suspected that, the adverse party living in Paris, they might become connected with the judges, and thus be all-powerful."

"Because, in the first place, they have justice on their side."

"How painful it is, my lord, to hear such words from the lips of a man infallible as you are!"

"I merely say all this to you because it is the truth, and yet," continued M. de Maupeou, with an affected frankness, "I should like, upon my word, to serve you."

The countess started: she thought that she saw some hidden meaning, if not in the chancellor's words, at least in his thoughts, which concealed behind it something favourable to her.

"Besides," he proceeded, "the name you bear is one of the noblest in France, and that is in itself a powerful recommendation to me."

"Ah, my lord, it will not prevent me from losing my suit."

"As to that, I have no power either one way or the other."

"Oh, my lord, my lord!" cried the countess, shaking her head, "how things go in this world now!"

"You seem to infer, madame, that in the good old times they went better."

"Alas, my lord, I cannot but think so. I recall with pleasure the time when you were merely a king's advocate in the parliament, and when you made those beautiful speeches which I, then a young woman, went to listen to, and which I applauded with such enthusiasm. What fire!—what eloquence!—what virtue! Ah, my lord, in those times there were no plots, no cabals, no favouritism! I should have gained my suit then."

"Yet we had Madame de Phalaris then, who tried to reign occasionally when the regent shut his eyes, and we had too La Souris, who went about picking up what crumbs she could manage to gather."

"Oh, my lord, but Madame de Phalaris was really a lady of rank, and La Souris was such a good-natured girl."

"Yes; so nothing was refused them."

"Or, rather, they could refuse no one."

"Come, madame," said the chancellor, laughing in a manner that

astonished the old lady more and more, it was so open and natural, "come, do not make me speak ill of my own administration, through affection for my youthful days."

"But, my lord, when I think of those days I must lament my lost fortune, my ruined family."

"You see, countess, what it is not to go with the times, not to sacrifice to the idols of the day."

"Alas, my lord, those idols care not for worshippers who come with empty hands!"

"What can you know about them?"

"I?"

"Yes; you have never tried them, I think."

"My lord, you speak to me really like a friend."

"Well—are we not about the same age, countess?"

"Oh! why am I not twenty! and you, my lord, a simple advocate again?—you would plead for me, and I should gain my suit."

"Unhappily, we are not twenty, countess," said the vice-chancellor, with a gallant sigh; "we must only therefore, beg those who are twenty to assist us, since you confess that that is the age to have influence. What!—do you know no one at court?"

"Some old noblemen who have left it now, I once knew, but they would blush for their old friend in her poverty. Stay, my lord, I have still the privilege of being received at court! I might go to Versailles—yet of what use would it be? Oh, had I again only my two hundred thousand crowns of income, people would come to visit me!—perform that miracle for me, my lord!"

The chancellor pretended not to hear this last phrase. "In your place," said he, "I should forget the old, as they have forgotten me. I should apply to the young, and beat up for recruits among them. Do you happen to know the princesses at all?"

"They must have forgotten me."

"And besides, they have no influence. Do you know the dauphin?"

"No."

"And, after all, he is so busy about his archduchess, who is about to arrive, that he can think of nothing else. Let me see—among the favourites—is there any one——"

"I don't even know their names."

"Monsieur d'Aguillon?"

"A coxcomb of whom such shameful things are said!—that he hid in a well whilst others were fighting!—Fie! fie!"

"Pooh! we must not believe the half of what we hear—but stay—let me think——"

"Do—do, my lord; think of some one!"

"Yes; why not? Yes! ha!—yes!"

"Who, my lord—who?"

"Why not apply to the countess herself?"

"To the Countess Dubarry?" said the old lady, spreading out her fan.

"Yes; she is really a kind creature."

"Indeed!"

"And anxious to be useful."

"I am of too ancient a family to please her, my lord."

"You are mistaken, countess; she tries to attach high families to her."

"Do you think so?" asked the old countess, already beginning to waver in her opposition.

"Do you know her?" said the chancellor.

"Oh, good heavens! no!"

"Ah, there is the mischief! She is the person who has real influence."

"Yes, yes, she has influence; but I never saw her."

"Nor her sister Chon?"

"No."

"Nor her sister Bischi?"

"No."

"Nor her brother Jean?"

"No."

"Nor her negro Zamore?"

"What—her negro, my lord?"

"Yes, her negro is one of the governing powers."

"What!—that little fright, whose picture is sold in the streets, which looks like that of a dressed-up pug-dog?"

"Yes, the same."

"*I* know that African!" cried the countess, with offended dignity. "How should I know him, my lord?"

"Well, well! I see you do not wish to keep your estates, countess."

"How is that?"

"Because you speak contemptuously of Zamore."

"But what has Zamore to do in the matter?"

"He might gain your suit for you—that is all."

"He? That Moor!—that Hottentot! How could he gain it for me?"

"By saying to his mistress that you wished to gain it. You know what influence is; he makes his mistress do what he chooses, and she makes the king do what she chooses."

"Then Zamore governs France, my lord?"

"Hum!" replied the chancellor, nodding his head. "He has a great deal of influence; and I had rather quarrel with—with the dauphiness, for instance—than with Zamore."

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed the countess, "if it were not a grave person like your lordship who told me such things, I could not believe them."

"Oh, I am not the only one who will tell them you. Everybody can tell them. Ask any of the dukes and peers if they ever forget, when going to Marly or Luciennes, to take comfits for Zamore to put in his mouth, or pearls for him to hang in his ears. I, who speak to you, am I not the chancellor of France, or something very near it? Well, what was I doing when you came in? I was drawing up a governor's commission for Zamore."

"A governor's commission?"

"Yes; Monsieur Zamore is appointed governor of the castle of Luciennes."

"The very same title with which they rewarded the Count de Bearn after twenty years' service."

"Yes; he was made governor of the castle of Blois. I remember that."

"But what a degradation! Good heavens! the monarchy is dead!"

"It is very ill, at least; and you know, countess, when an invalid draws near his end, people try to get all they can from him."

"No doubt—no doubt; but the question is how to get near this invalid."

"Do you know what you must do to be well received by the Countess Dubarry?"

"What?"

"You must get admitted by being the bearer of this commission for her negro."

"I?"

"It will be an excellent beginning."

"Do you think so, my lord?" said the poor countess, all alarmed.

"I am sure of it; but——"

"But what?"

"Do you know any one acquainted with her?"

"No one but yourself, my lord."

"Oh, as for me, it would be difficult for me to introduce you."

"Assuredly," said the poor old lady, tossed to and fro by alternate hopes and fears, "assuredly, fortune is hostile to me! Your lordship has received me in a manner quite unexpected, for indeed I did not expect to be admitted to an audience; then, you have inclined me to pay my court to Madame Dubarry—I, a Bearn!—and I am ready to undertake the hateful task of delivering the commission for her wretch of a negro, and now I cannot even get an introduction to her!"

The chancellor began again to stroke his chin, and appeared very thoughtful, when suddenly the usher announced, "M. le Viscount Jean Dubarry!"

At this name the chancellor made a gesture of amazement, and the countess sank back breathless in her chair.

"Now, say that fortune has abandoned you! Ah! countess, countess, heaven is working in your favour."

Then, turning to the usher, without giving the old lady time to recover, he desired that the viscount should be admitted instantly. The usher withdrew, and in a moment after our old acquaintance Jean Dubarry entered, with his arm in a sling.

After the usual number of bows were made on both sides, and as the countess, trembling and undecided, was trying to rise in order to take leave—for the chancellor by a slight movement of the head had indicated to her that her audience was ended—"Pardon me, my lord," said the viscount; "pardon me, madame—I interrupt you, I fear—but I beg of you not to go away; I have only two words to say to his lordship."

The countess sat down again without requiring to be pressed, her heart full of joy and expectation.

"But perhaps, sir, I shall be in your way?" she stammered.

"Oh, madame, not at all—not at all. I merely wish to lodge a short complaint with his lordship."

"A complaint!—Against whom?" exclaimed the chancellor.

"An attack upon me, my lord!—an assassination! One cannot pass over such things as that. Let them abuse us, make ballads about us, blacken us, we can survive all that; but when it comes to cutting our throats—mordieu! we die!"

"Explain the affair, I beg," said the chancellor, pretending to be very much horrified.

"It is easily done—but I fear I am interrupting this lady's audience."

"The Countess de Bearn," said the chancellor, introducing the old lady to the Viscount Jean Dubarry.

Dubarry retreated gracefully to make his bow, the countess to make her curtsey; and both saluted as ceremoniously as if they had been at court.

"After you, sir," said she.

"Madame, I would not be guilty of such treason against gallantry for the world."

"Oh, sir, my business only concerns money, in yours honour is concerned; yours is therefore more urgent."

"Then, madame," said the viscount, "since it is your wish, I shall take advantage of your obliging permission." And he related his tale to the chancellor, who listened very gravely.

"You will require witnesses," said Monsieur de Maupeou, after a moment's reflection.

"Ah," cried Dubarry, "how easily one discovers, even in those words, the upright judge who can only be influenced by irrefutable truth! Well, I can procure witnesses."

"My lord," said the countess, "the viscount has found one already."

"What witness?" they both asked.

"I, myself," the countess replied.

"You?" exclaimed the chancellor.

"Sir," said she, addressing the viscount, "did not this affair happen at the village of Lachaussée?"

"Yes, madame."

"At the post-house?"

"Yes."

"Well, I shall be your witness. I passed through the place where the attack was made on you two hours after it happened."

"Really, madame?" said the chancellor.

"Yes," continued the countess, "and everybody was talking of what had just taken place."

"Take care!" said the viscount, "take care, madame!—if you consent to aid me in this matter, very likely the Choiseuls will find some means of making you repent of it."

"Ah!" said the chancellor, "and the more easily that the Countess de Bearn is engaged in a lawsuit, her chance of gaining which is very doubtful, I am afraid."

"Oh, my lord," cried the old lady, putting her hand to her head, "I sink from one difficulty to another!"

"Lean upon the viscount," said the chancellor, in a half whisper; "he has a powerful arm to assist you."

"Only one at present," said Dubarry, with a simper. "But I know a certain person who has two good arms—they can reach far, and I offer you their aid."

"Oh, Monsieur le Viscount, are you serious in making me such an offer?"

"It is only service for service, madame. I accept your aid—you accept mine. Is it agreed?"

"Do I accept yours? Oh, sir, you do me too much honour!"

"Then, madame, will you take a seat in my carriage; I am just going to pay a visit to my sister?"

"Without any reason—without any preparations? Oh, sir, I dare not——"

"You have a reason, madame," said the chancellor, slipping into her hand Zamore's commission.

"My lord, you are my tutelary genius!" cried the old lady, taking the document. "Monsieur le Viscount, you are the flower of the French nobility."

"At your service," said the viscount, pointing the way to the countess, who was as quick as a bird to take it.

"Thanks for my sister," whispered Jean in the chancellor's ear; "thank you, cousin! But did I play my part well?—eh?"

"Admirably," said Maupeou; "but pray make the countess laugh by telling her how I played mine. But, take care! the old lady is as sharp as a needle!"

At that moment the countess turned: the two gentlemen bowed formally to one another, as if taking a ceremonious adieu.

A splendid carriage, with attendants in the royal livery, waited at the door; the old lady took her place in it quite elated; Jean seated himself beside her, and they departed.

After the king left Madame Dubarry, as we have formerly related, after a very cold and constrained reception, the countess was left alone with Chon and her brother, who had not appeared at first for fear of his wound being examined, it being, in reality, very trifling. The result of this family council was, that the countess, instead of going to Luciennes as she had told the king, set off for Paris. She had there, in the Rue de Valois, a snug little house which served as a place of rendezvous for all her family, every member of which was constantly running backwards and forwards, hither and thither, as business or pleasure led them.

The countess being installed in this domicile of hers, took a book and waited. Meantime the viscount prepared his battery.

It might be about half-past seven by the large dial of the church of St. Eustache, when the Countess de Bearn and Viscount Dubarry passed by on their way to his sister's.

The conversation on her side expressed great reluctance to avail herself of the good fortune which had fallen in her way. On his, there was the assumption of a sort of dignity in being her patron, with repeated exclamations at the happy chance which enabled him to introduce her to the Countess Dubarry. In return, the old lady never ceased praising the politeness and affability of the chancellor. All these fits on both sides, however, did not prevent the horses from going as fast as they could, and they reached their place of destination a little before eight.

"Permit me, madame," said the viscount, leaving the old lady in an ante-room, "to inform the Countess Dubarry of the honour you have done her."

"Oh, sir!" said the countess, "do not, I entreat you, allow my unseasonable visit to disturb her."

Jean approached Zamore, who was watching for his return out of one of the windows, and whispered something in his ear.

"What a dear little negro!" cried the countess; "is he your sister's, sir?"

"Yes; he is one of her favourites, madame."

"I congratulate her on having such a one."

At this moment a footman opened the folding-doors of the saloon where Madame Dubarry usually granted audiences, and requested the countess to walk in there. Whilst the old lady was sighing over the luxurious furniture of the apartment, Jean was with his sister announcing his prize.

"Is it really she?" asked Madame Dubarry.

"Flesh and blood!"

"Does she suspect anything?"

"Nothing in the world."

"And how did the Vice behave?"

"Admirably!—everything conspired to favour us."

"Do not let us leave her too long alone, lest she should suspect something."

"You are right; for I assure you, she seems to me cunning enough."

"Where is Chon?"

"At Versailles, you know."

"Well, she must not by any means let herself be seen."

"Oh, I warned her!"

"Now, princess, enter."

Madame Dubarry gently pushed open the door of her boudoir and entered the saloon.

All the ceremonial necessary to the etiquette of those days was scrupulously gone through by the two actresses, mutally desirous of pleasing. Madame Dubarry was the first to speak.

"I have already thanked my brother, madame, for having procured me the honour of this visit, allow me now to thank you also for having consented to his wish."

"I know not, madame," replied the old lady, "in what terms to thank you for this gracious reception of me."

"Madame," said the countess, in her turn, with a curtsey of profound respect, "it is only due to a lady of your rank to place myself at your disposal, if I can be of service to you in any way."

And three more curtseys having been made on each side, the countess invited Madame de Bearn to be seated.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ZAMORE'S COMMISSION.

"MADAME," said the favourite, "pray let me hear your wishes—I am all attention."

"Permit me, sister," said Jean, who continued standing, "to disabuse your mind of the idea that the Countess de Bearn comes with a petition —not at all—the chancellor has simply asked her to perform a little office for him."

The old lady turned a grateful look on the viscount, and held out to the countess the patent signed by the vice-chancellor declaring Luciennes a royal castle, and Zamore its governor.

"Then it is I who am the person obliged," said the countess, glancing at the document; "if I could only be so fortunate, madame, as to be of any service to you in return."

"Oh, that you can readily be!" exclaimed the old lady, with a frankness which enchanted the brother and sister.

"Pray let me know how, madame?"

"You were kind enough to say that my name is not quite unknown to you, madame."

"Unknown?—a Bearn!"

"Then you have perhaps heard of a lawsuit which threatens my whole property."

"Oh, yes!—a suit between you and the family of the Saluces?"

"Alas, madame, yes!"

"I know all about it, madame, I heard his majesty the other evening speak of it to my cousin the chancellor."

"His majesty speak of my lawsuit?"

"Yes, madame."

"And in what terms, pray?"

"Alas! my dear madame!"—and Madame Dubarry shook her head.

"As lost, as lost,—was it not?" exclaimed the old lady, with anguish.

"If I must speak the truth, madame, it was."

"His majesty said so?"

"His majesty had too much prudence and delicacy to pronounce sentence decidedly, but he seemed to look upon the adverse party as already in possession of the estate."

"Oh, heavens! madame, if his majesty were but rightly informed on the subject—if he knew that all this was about a bond really discharged! yes, madame, the two hundred thousand francs have been paid. I have not a receipt for the money, certainly; but I have a moral certainty that it was paid. I could, if I was allowed to plead in person before the parliament, demonstrate it by inference."

"By inference?" exclaimed Madame Dubarry, who did not understand one word of what she said, but who appeared to pay the most serious attention.

"Yes, madame, by inference."

"The proof by inference is admissible," said Jean.

"Do you think so, sir?" asked the old lady.

"Yes, I think it is," replied the viscount, with profound gravity.

"Well, then, by inference I could prove that the bond for two hundred thousand francs with the interest accumulated, amounting to a total of about one million—I could prove that this bond, bearing date 1406, was discharged by Guy Gaston, the fourth Count of Bearn on his deathbed in 1417; for there it is written by his own hand in his will—'Being on my deathbed, and *owing nothing to any man*, and ready to appear before God——'"

"Well?" said Madame Dubarry.

"Well, madame, if he owed nothing to any man, he owed nothing to the family of the Saluces, otherwise he would have said—'owing two hundred thousand francs,' instead of saying 'owing nothing to any man.'"

"Most undoubtedly he would have said so," exclaimed Jean.

"But have you no other proof?" asked the favourite.

"Than his word?—none, madame; but he was called Gaston the Irreproachable."

"And your opponents have the bond?"

"Yes; they have, and that is just what makes the affair more intricate."

She should have said, "That is just what clears up the matter;" but she looked at things in her own point of view.

"So your conviction is, madame, that the bond was discharged," said Jean.

"Yes, sir, that is my decided conviction," exclaimed Madame de Bearn, warmly.

"Do you know," said the countess, turning to her brother, as if deeply penetrated by that conviction, "the proof by inference, as the Countess de Bearn calls it, changes the face of things wonderfully."

"Oh, wonderfully!" returned Jean.

"And very unpleasantly for my opponents," continued the countess: "the terms of Gaston IV.'s will are most positive—'owing nothing to any man——'"

"It is not only clear, it is logical," said Jean; "he owed nothing to any man, therefore, of course he had paid what he owed."

"Therefore he had paid what he owed," repeated the Countess Dubarry

"Oh, madame, why are you not my judge?" ejaculated the old lady.

"Formerly," said the viscount, "we should not have had recourse to the tribunals to settle an affair of that kind—the judgment of heaven would have been enough. For my part, I am so convinced of the goodness of your cause, that, did the old custom still exist, I should willingly offer myself for your champion."

"Oh, sir!"

"Yes, I should act as did my grandfather, Dubarry-Moore, who had the honour of being connected with the royal family of the Stuarts, when he fought in the lists for the beautiful Edith of Scarborough, and made his adversary confess that he lied in his throat. But unhappily," continued the viscount, with a sigh of disdain for the degeneracy of the age, "we live not in those glorious times, and gentlemen, when they claim their rights, must submit their causes to the judgment of a set of pettifoggers who have not the sense to understand a phrase so clear as—'owing nothing to any man.'"

"But, brother," said the countess, "it is three hundred years since those words were written, so you must allow that the gentlemen of the long robe may well pause a little before deciding on them."

"Oh, no matter—no matter—I am certain that if his majesty heard the Countess de Bearn state her case herself as she has done to us——"

"I should convince his majesty—should I not, sir?"

"I am certain of it."

"Yes; but how am I to obtain an audience of his majesty?"

"You must come and visit me at Luciennes; and as his majesty does me the honour of coming sometimes to see me there——"

"My dear," interrupted the viscount, "that is all very well, but it depends on chance."

"Viscount," replied the favourite, with a sweet smile, "you know that I depend a good deal on chance, and I have no reason to complain."

"Yes, but the Countess de Bearn might go to Luciennes for a week or a fortnight, and yet not meet his majesty."

"That is true."

"In the meantime, her cause is to come on on Monday or Tuesday."

"On Tuesday, sir."

"And this is Friday evening."

"Ah, then," said Madame Dubarry, with a countenance all disappointment, "we must not reckon upon that."

"What shall we do?" said the viscount, as if in deep thought. "What a devil of a business!"

"I might have an audience at Versailles," suggested the old lady, timidly.

"Oh, you will not obtain it."

"But through your influence, madame?"

"Oh, my influence would be of no avail. His majesty detests business matters—and, besides, his mind is now full of one thing only."

"The parliaments?" asked Madame de Bearn.

"No—my presentation."

"Ah!" said the old lady.

"For you know, madame, in spite of the opposition of Monsieur de Choiseul and Madame de Grammont, the king has decided that I shall be presented."

"I was not aware, madame."

"It is a settled affair," said Jean.

"And when will the presentation take place, madame?"

"Oh! very soon."

"You see the king wishes it to be before the arrival of the dauphiness, that he may invite my sister to share the festivities at Compiègne."

"Ah—I understand. Then you have all the arrangements made for your presentation," said the old countess, sighing.

"Oh, yes," replied the viscount, "the Baroness d'Alogny—do you know the Baroness d'Alogny?"

"No, sir. Alas! I scarcely know any one now. It is twenty years since I was at court."

"Well, it is the Baroness d'Alogny who is to present my sister. The king loads her with favours—her husband is chamberlain—he is to be raised from a baron to a count—the son is to go into the guards—her orders on the king's privy purse are to be made payable by the city of Paris, and the day of the presentation she is to receive twenty thousand crowns paid down; so she is eager for it, you may be sure!"

"Yes, I can readily understand that," said the old lady, smiling.

"Oh, but now I think of it——" cried Jean.

"Of what?" asked the Countess Dubarry.

"What a misfortune!—what a misfortune!" continued he, "that I did not meet madame a week sooner at our cousin the vice-chancellor's."

"Why, pray?"

"Why, we had no positive engagement then with the Baroness d'Alogny."

"Dear brother, you speak like a sphinx—I do not understand you."

"You do not understand?"

"No."

"I will wager something the Countess de Bearn understands!"

"No, sir, I do not, indeed."

"Last week you had not decided who should present you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well—the Countess de Bearn—but perhaps, madame, I am taking too great a liberty?"

"No, sir—no."

"Then madame could have presented you, and the king would have done for her what he is going to do for the Baroness d'Alogny."

"Alas!" said the old lady, opening her eyes to their utmost extent.

"Oh, if you knew," continued Jean, "all the favours his majesty heaped on the family of the baroness, as soon as he knew she had offered to introduce Jeanne! There was only one thing in the affair that vexed him——"

"Ah, one thing vexed him?"

"Yes—one single thing—'One thing vexes me,' said he.—'The lady who presents the Countess Dubarry I should have wished to bear an historical name,' and as he said that, he looked at the picture of Charles I., by Vandyck."

"Yes, I understand," said the old lady; "his majesty turned to that picture on account of the alliance between the Dubarry-Moores and the Stuarts, of which you spoke just now."

"Precisely."

"The fact is," said the old lady, with a slight air of hauteur, "I never heard of the family of D'Alogny."

"A good family, however," said the countess; "they have brought forward all the necessary proofs, or nearly all."

"Pardieu!" cried Jean, suddenly starting in his chair.

"Well, what is the matter?" said Madame Dubarry, scarcely able to refrain from laughing outright at the contortions of her brother-in-law.

"Monsieur has hurt himself, perhaps?" asked the old lady, anxiously.

"No," said Jean, sinking slowly back again into his chair, "it was an idea which just then occurred to me."

"What idea?" said the countess, laughing; "it almost overturned you."

"It must certainly have been a good one," said Madame de Bearn.

"Excellent!"

"Well? we are all anxiety to hear it."

"It has only one fault."

"Well?"

"It is impossible."

"No matter; let us hear it."

"Suppose you were to tell the Baroness d'Alogny the king's remark when he looked at Charles I.'s portrait?"

"Oh, brother, that would not be polite, we cannot think of it."

The old lady sighed.

"It is vexatious too," continued the viscount, as if speaking to himself; "the affair could have been so easily arranged:—the Countess de Bearn, who not only bears such an ancient name, but is besides a woman of distinguished talent, would offer herself in the place of the Baroness d'Alogny; she would have gained her lawsuit; her son would have got a commission as lieutenant in the guards, and as madame must, of course, have been put to considerable expense in her frequent visits to Paris, there would have been adequate compensation allowed. Such an opportunity does not occur twice in a lifetime!"

"Alas no!" exclaimed the old lady, quite overcome by this unforeseen blow.

The fact is, that any one in the position of the old litigant would have felt inclined to echo her exclamation, and like her would have sunk back, overwhelmed, in the easy chair.

"Now, brother," said the countess, in a tone of great compassion, "you see you are giving pain to Madame de Bearn; was it not enough that I was forced to tell her I could do nothing for her with the king before my presentation?"

"Oh, if I could delay my suit," sighed the countess.

"For only eight days," said Dubarry.

"Yes, in eight days," resumed Madame de Bearn, "in eight days madame will be presented."

"Yes; but the king will be at Compiègne in eight days—he will be in the midst of festivities—the dauphiness will have arrived."

"Stop! I have another idea. No—yes—no—yes, yes!—I have hit it!"

"What is it, sir?" said Madame de Bearn, whose whole soul seemed to hang upon the viscount's lips, and who repeated mechanically the monosyllables he uttered.

"Your presentation is still a secret; no one knows that you have got a lady to present you?"

"No; for the king wishes it to fall like a thunderbolt on the court."

"Well, the Countess de Bearn will demand an audience of the king, as she is not supposed to know any more about your presentation than others, for the purpose of offering to present you. The king, at such an offer from a lady of her rank, will be delighted; he will receive her, thank her, will ask her what he can do for her. She will introduce the subject of her

lawsuit, and explain her views respecting it—his majesty will give them a favourable consideration, and the suit which she thought lost—is gained !"

The favourite fixed her eager gaze on the old lady, who probably began to suspect that there was some snare laid for her. "I am a poor unknown creature," said she ; "his majesty would not, perhaps——"

"Enough. I merely wished to give you a friendly advice on the matter," said Jean.

"Oh, sir, I am only too sensible——" said the countess, hesitating.

"It is not a bad idea," replied Madame Dubarry, smiling ; "but perhaps madame would not like to descend to anything like a trick, even to gain her lawsuit."

"Quite true, madame," said the old lady, hoping to get off by this means ; "I had much rather do you some real service to obtain your friendship."

"Indeed, nothing could be more condescending," said the favourite, with a slight shade of irony which did not escape the penetration of Madame de Bearn.

"Well, I have still another means," said Jean. The old lady listened anxiously.

"Really, brother, your imagination is as fertile in resources as that of M. de Beaumarchais. Let us hear this last idea."

"It is that the Countess de Bearn shall render you the real service which she wishes to do. Can you not persuade the Baroness d'Alogny to yield her rights to the countess ?—you need not tell her plumply the king's observation, but you could, with your tact, make her understand that he preferred the countess's ancient name."

This time the attack was direct ; he thought there could be no evasive answer, but the countess found one.

"I should not like to interfere with that lady's arrangements," said she ; "among persons of quality a certain attention to these engagements must be observed."

Madame Dubarry made a gesture of anger and disappointment, but the viscount by a look restrained her.

"Observe, madame," said he, "I insist on nothing. Like many in the world, you have a lawsuit, which very naturally you wish to gain. It appears, however, that on the contrary, you are likely to lose it ; you are in despair ; just at that moment I arrive ; I feel for you ; I take an interest in an affair which does not in the remotest degree concern me ; I endeavour to make it turn out favourably for you. I am wrong—let us say no more about it !" and Jean rose from his seat.

"Oh, sir," exclaimed the old lady in despair, for she now saw that the Dubarries, who had been till then indifferent, were going to use their influence against her ; "oh, sir, believe me, I am truly grateful to you ! I feel how benevolent have been your intentions."

"As for myself," replied Jean, playing to the life the part of a person perfectly unconcerned, "it matters not whether my sister be presented by the Baroness d'Alogny, the Countess de Polastron, or the Countess de Bearn."

"Oh, certainly, sir."

"Only I confess I felt annoyed that the royal favour should be bestowed on some mean spirit, actuated by sordid interest—a spirit yielding to our power, because it is impossible to undermine it."

"Oh, that is what will most probably happen," said the favourite.

"Whilst," continued Jean, "the Countess de Bearn, almost an entire

stranger to us, and coming forward without any solicitation on our part, and prompted solely by her kindness and good nature to offer her services, appears to me worthy of all the advantages which would thereby accrue to her."

The old lady was probably about to disclaim that good-will which the viscount did her the honour to attribute to her, but Madame Dubarry did not give her time.

"The fact is," said she, "the king would not refuse anything to a lady who would act as you describe."

"What! the king would not refuse anything, do you say?"

"Even more—he would say with his own lips to the vice-chancellor, 'M. de Maupeou, I wish that everything should be settled about the lawsuit as the Countess de Bearn wishes;' but it seems, however, as if you saw some difficulty in the matter. Very good. But you will at least do me the justice, I hope, to believe that I was actuated by a sincere wish to serve you, madame," and the viscount bowed.

"Indeed, sir, my heart is filled with gratitude to you!"

"Pray do not speak of it," said the gallant viscount.

"But the Baroness d'Alogny would not yield up her right?" resumed the old lady, after a short pause.

"Still, his majesty would not be the less grateful to you for your offer."

"But supposing," persisted the old lady, who was determined to view the matter in the worst light, in order to see to the bottom of the affair—"supposing the baroness would yield her privilege to me, she would not so readily give up the accompanying advantages."

"The king's kindness is inexhaustible, madame," said the favourite.

"If I offered my services, madame," replied the old lady, drawn on more and more both by her interest and by the clever manner in which they played their parts, "I should leave out of view the gaining of my cause—for, to say the truth, a suit which every one thinks lost to-day, will not be easily gained to-morrow."

"Oh—but if the king were favourable!" exclaimed Jean, eager to combat her new doubts.

"Well," said the favourite, "I confess I am of the countess's opinion, viscount."

"You are?" said he, staring at her with open eyes.

"Yes—I think it would be more honourable for a lady of her ancient name to allow her suit to go as it may. Then there would be nothing binding on the king—nothing to impede his munificence to her; and if he did not wish, in the present state of the parliaments, to interfere with the course of justice, he might offer her compensation for the loss of the suit."

"Ah," sighed the old lady, "how could he offer anything to compensate for the loss of two hundred thousand francs?"

"Why, in the first place," replied Madame Dubarry, "there might, for instance, be a royal gift of one hundred thousand francs."

The partners in this scheme looked at their victim with eager eyes.

"I have a son——" said she.

"So much the better! One more loyal servant of the state."

"But do you think, madame, there would be anything done for my son?"

"I can answer for it," said Jean, "that the least he might expect would be a lieutenancy in the guards."

"Have you any other relations?" inquired the Countess Dubarry.

"I have a nephew."

"Well, we should find out something for your nephew," said the viscount.

"I think we may leave that in your hands, viscount," said the favourite, laughing, "as you have just given us proofs of so brilliant an imagination!"

"Well," continued the viscount, apparently determined to bring matters to an issue, "if his majesty did all these things for you, would you think it tolerably well?"

"I should think him extremely generous, and should offer you, madame, all my thanks—convinced that it was to you alone I should be indebted for his generosity."

"Then," asked the favourite, "you really take our proposal seriously into consideration?"

"Yes, madame—most seriously," replied the old lady, turning pale at the very thought of the obligation to which she pledged herself.

"And you permit me to mention you to his majesty?"

"Pray do me that honour," replied she, with a deep sigh.

"Madame, I shall do so with the least possible delay—indeed, this very evening," said the favourite, rising to terminate the interview. "And in the mean time, I trust that I have secured your friendship."

"I feel so highly honoured by yours, madame," said the old lady, beginning her curtseys again, "that I almost feel as if all this were a dream."

"Let us see, once more," said Jean, wishing to fix the matter so firmly in the old countess's mind that it might be secure from all change. "One hundred thousand francs first, to make up for the loss of the suit; a lieutenancy for the young count; and something for a nephew."

"Something?"

"I shall find out something good—that is my affair."

"And when shall I have the honour of seeing you again, madame?" asked the old lady.

"To-morrow morning my carriage shall be at your door to take you to Luciennes—the king will be there. To-morrow, at ten o'clock, I shall have fulfilled my promise—his majesty will be informed, and will expect you."

"Allow me to accompany you, madame," said Jean, offering his arm.

"By no means, sir!"

"Well, then, to the top of the stairs?"

"Since you insist on it——" and she took the viscount's arm.

"Zamore!" cried the countess.

Zamore appeared.

"Light this lady downstairs, and order my brother's carriage forward to the door."

The two ladies exchanged a last curtsey. At the top of the staircase Jean bade the old countess adieu, and returned to his sister, while Madame de Bearn majestically descended the grand staircase. Zamore marched first—then came two footmen with lights—and then the old lady, her train (rather a short one) borne by a third footman.

The brother and sister watched at the window, following with their eyes to the very carriage the precious chaperon, sought with so much care, and found with so much difficulty. Just as she reached the door a chaise entered the courtyard, and a young lady sprang out.

"Ah, Mistress Chon!" cried Zamore, opening his enormous mouth to its widest extent with delight. "How do you do this evening, Mistress Chon?"

The Countess de Bearn stood petrified! In the new arrival she recog-

nised her visitor—the false daughter of Master Flageot. Dubarry hurriedly opened a window, and made frantic signs to his sister—but she did not see them.

"Has that little fool, Gilbert, been here?" inquired Chon of a lackey, without perceiving the countess.

"No, madame," replied one of the footmen; "we have not seen him."

It was just then that, looking up, she saw her brother—and following the direction of his hand, discovered Madame de Bearn. Chon recognised her—hastily pulled down her hood, and rushed into the vestibule.

The old lady, without appearing to have remarked anything, got into the carriage and gave her address to the coachman.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE KING GETS TIRED.

THE king, who had gone to Marly, as he had said he would, ordered his carriage at three o'clock in the afternoon, and drove from that to Luciennes. He supposed that Madame Dubarry, on receiving his note, would immediately leave Versailles, and hasten there to wait for him.

He was rather surprised therefore, on entering the château, to find Zamore—looking very little like a governor—occupied in plucking out the feathers of a parrot, which, in return, was endeavouring to bite him

The two favourites were rivals, like the Duke de Choiseul and the Countess Dubarry.

The king installed himself in the small saloon, and dismissed his attendants. Although the most inquisitive gentleman in his kingdom, he was not in the habit of questioning servants or lackeys; but Zamore was neither a servant nor a lackey: he occupied a middle place between the monkey and the parrot. The king therefore questioned Zamore.

"Is the countess in the garden?"

"No, master." This word the favourite, in one of her whims, had ordered to take the place of majesty at Luciennes.

"Is she at the lake, feeding the carp?"

This lake had been dug at a vast expense out of the side of the hill. It was fed with water from the aqueduct, and filled with great numbers of the finest carp, brought from Versailles.

"No, master," again answered Zamore.

"Where is she, then?"

"In Paris, master."

"What! Did the countess not come to Luciennes?"

"No, master—but she sent Zamore."

"What to do?"

"To wait for the king."

"Ah, ha! so you are delegated to receive me? Very agreeable, indeed? Thank you, countess! Thank you! I am to have the society of Zamore!" And he rose from his chair rather piqued.

"Oh, no, the king is not to have the society of Zamore," said the negro.

"Why not?"

"Because Zamore is going away."

"Where are you going?"

"To Paris."

"Then I am to be left alone? Better and better. But why go to Paris?"

"To find Mistress Barry and tell her the king is at Luciennes."

"Oh, the countess desired you to tell me that, then?"

"Yes, master."

"And did she tell you what I was to do till she came?"

"She said you were to sleep."

"Ah!" said the king to himself, "she will not be long, and she has some surprise for me;" then he added aloud, "Go then and bring back the countess. But how will you travel!"

"On the great white horse with the scarlet housings."

"And how long does it take for the great white horse to go to Paris?"

"I do not know," said the negro boy; "but he goes fast, fast, fast! Zamore likes to go fast."

"Indeed! I am extremely fortunate to find that Zamore likes to go fast."

And he stationed himself at the window to see Zamore depart.

A tall footman lifted him on the horse, and with the happy ignorance of childhood, the little negro set off at a gallop on his gigantic steed.

The king, being left alone, asked a footman at last if there were anything new at Luciennes. The servant replied that there was only Monsieur Boucher, who was painting the countess's boudoir.

"Oh, Boucher, poor Boucher, is he here?" said the king, with a slight appearance of satisfaction; "and where is he?"

"In the summer-house; shall I show your majesty the way to it?"

"No, no; I should rather go and see the carps. Give me a knife."

"A knife, sire?"

"Yes, and a large loaf."

The valet returned carrying a large loaf, with a long knife stuck in it, on a china plate. The king made a sign to the valet to accompany him, and with a pleased air led the way to the pond.

The feeding of carps was a traditional occupation in the Bourbon family, the Grand Monarque never missing it for a single day. Louis XV. seated himself on a mossy bank, from which the view before him was charming.

There lay the little lake, with its velvet slopes of turf; beyond it a village nestled between two hills; further off, the towers of Saint Germain, with their wooded terraces, and further still the blue declivities of Saunois and Cormeilles; whilst, above all this, the grey and rose-tinged sky hung like a magnificent cupola. The weather had been stormy, and the foliage of the trees looked dark and heavy against the pale green of the meadows; the waters of the lake, glassy and immovable as a vast surface of oil, were disturbed from time to time by some silvery flashing fish springing up to seize the unwary fly, and chequering it with wide-spreading circles of alternate black and white. At the margin might be perceived the enormous snouts of a number of fish, which, fearless of hook or net, sucked the leaves of pendant plants, and with their huge fixed eyes, which seemed incapable of sight, stared at the grey lizards and green frogs sporting among the bulrushes.

When the king, like a man profoundly skilled in the art of killing time, had looked at the landscape on all sides, when he had counted the houses in the village, and the villages in the distance, he took the plate with the loaf, placed it beside him, and began to cut off large pieces of the bread.

The carps heard the sound of the knife in the crust, and accustomed to that noise, which announced their dinner hour, they immediately flocked as close as possible to the bank, to show themselves to his majesty and solicit their daily meal. They would have done the same for any footman in his service, but the king naturally thought that all this trouble was for him alone.

He threw in one after another the pieces of bread, which first disappearing for an instant, and then, returning to the surface, were contended for for some time, then, gradually crumbling away by the action of the water, were seized and seen no more. It was indeed a curious and amusing enough sight to see all these crusts pushed hither and thither by the invisible snouts, and tossed on the surface of the water, until the moment when they were swallowed.

At the end of about half an hour, his majesty, having in that time patiently cut one hundred bits of crust, had the satisfaction of seeing that not one remained floating. He began now, however, to feel rather tired of the sport, and he remembered that Monsieur Boucher might amuse him a little; he would not certainly be as good a resource as the carps, but in the country we must take what we can get.

Louis, therefore, turned towards the summer-house. Boucher had heard that he was at Luciennes, and though he went on painting, or seeming to paint, he followed the king with his eyes, saw him turn in the direction of the summer-house, and radiant with joy, he adjusted his ruffles and mounted on his ladder, for he had been warned not to appear to know that the king was there. He heard a step on the floor of the room, and began to daub a fat Cupid stealing a rose from a shepherdess in a blue satin gown and straw hat. His hand trembled, his heart beat. The king stopped on the threshold.

"Ah, Boucher," cried he; "how you smell of turpentine!" and he walked on.

Poor Boucher, although he knew the king had no taste for the fine arts, did expect some other kind of compliment, and was nearly falling from his ladder. He came down and went away with the tears in his eyes, without scraping his palette or washing his brushes, which, in general, he was so careful to do.

His majesty pulled out his watch—it was seven o'clock.

Louis returned to the house, teased the monkey, made the parrot speak, pulled out all the drawers of the cabinets, one after the other, and ransacked their contents.

Evening drew on. The king was not fond of darkness, and the apartments were lighted up. But he did not like solitude either.

"My horses in a quarter of an hour!" said he. "Ma foi!" added he, "I shall just give her one quarter of an hour; not a minute longer."

As he said this, he stretched himself on a sofa opposite the fireplace, to watch the course of the fifteen minutes, that is, of nine hundred seconds. At the four hundredth beat of the timepiece, which represented a blue elephant carrying a pink sultana, he was asleep.

As may be supposed, the footman who came to announce his majesty's carriage took care not to awake him. The result of this attention to his august slumber was, that when he awoke of his own accord, he found himself face to face with the Countess Dubarry, who was looking at him with her eyes wide open. Zamore stood in a corner waiting for orders.

"Ah! you are here at last, countess," said the king, sitting up on the sofa.

"Yes, sire, here I am," said the countess, "and here I have been a pretty long time."

"Oh! a pretty long time?"

"An hour and a half at least But how your majesty does sleep!"

"Faith, countess, you were not here, and I was getting shockingly tired; and then I sleep so badly at night. Do you know, I was on the point of going away!"

"Yes, I saw your majesty's carriage at the door."

The king looked at his watch.

"Half-past ten—then I have slept nearly three hours!"

"After that, sire, say that you cannot sleep well at Luciennes!"

"Oh, faith, very well; but what the devil do I see there?" said he, looking at Zamore.

"You see the governor of Luciennes, sire."

"Not yet, not yet," said the king, laughing. "The little wretch has put on his uniform before having been appointed; he reckons on my word, then?"

"Sire, your word is sacred, and he is right in reckoning on it. But Zamore has something more than your word, or rather something less—he has his commission; the vice-chancellor sent it to me. The oath is now the only formality which is wanting; make him swear quickly, and then betake himself to his post."

"Approach, governor," said the king.

Zamore came forward. He was dressed in a uniform, with an embroidered collar and a captain's epaulettes, with short breeches, silk stockings, and a sword like a spit. He walked with a stiff, measured step, an enormous three-cornered hat under his arm.

"Can he swear?" asked the king.

"Oh, yes, sire; try him."

"Advance," cried he, looking curiously at the black puppet.

"On your knees!" said the countess.

"Swear!" said the king.

The child placed one hand on his heart, the other in the king's hand, and said, "I swear fealty and homage to my master and mistress; I swear to defend to the death the castle in my keeping, and to eat the last pot of sweetmeats rather than surrender, should I be attacked."

The king laughed as much at the form of the oath as at the gravity with which Zamore pronounced it.

"In return for this oath," he replied, with suitable gravity, "I confer on you the sovereign rights of justice on high and low, on all inhabiting air, earth, fire, and water, in this castle."

"Thank you, master," said Zamore, rising.

"And now," said the king, "go and show off your fine clothes in the kitchens, and leave us alone; go!"

As Zamore went out at one door, Chon entered by another.

"Ah, and you there, too, my little Chon! Come, I shall hear the truth from you."

"Take care, sire, that you are not disappointed in your expectations!" said Chon; "the truth is, it would be for the first time in my life. If you wish to learn the truth, apply to my sister—she is incapable of speaking falsely."

"Is that true, countess?"

"Sire, Chon has too flattering an opinion of me—bad example has

ruined me—and from this evening forth I am determined to lie like a real countess, if the truth will not serve me."

"Oh, ho!" said the king; "I suspect Chon has something to conceal from me. I must get from the police a report of what has occurred to-day."

"From which police, sire—Sartines' or mine?"

"Oh, from Sartines'."

"What will you pay him for it?"

"If he tell me anything worth hearing, I shall not be niggardly."

"Well, then, give my police the preference, and take my report. I shall serve you—royally."

"You will even sell your own secrets?"

"Why not, if I am well paid?"

"Come, then, let me hear the report—but no fibs, remember!"

"Sire, you insult me."

"I mean, no equivocations."

"Well, sire, get your funds ready—I am about to begin my report."

"They are ready," said the king, jingling some money in his pocket.

"In the first place, the Countess Dubarry was seen in Paris, in the Rue de Valois, about two o'clock in the afternoon."

"Well, I know that—go on!"

"About six o'clock Zamore proceeded to join her there."

"Very possibly; but what did Madame Dubarry go to Paris for?"

"Sire, to meet the lady who is to present her."

"Pooh!" said the king, with a grimace which he could not altogether conceal, "she is very well as she is, without being presented."

"You know the proverb, sire, nothing is so dear to us as that which we have not."

"So she is absolutely determined to find this lady to present her?"

"We have found her, sire."

The king started, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I like that movement, sire; it shows that your majesty would be annoyed at the defeat of the Grammonts, the Guemenées, and all the hypocrites of the court," said the countess.

"I beg your pardon; did you speak?"

"Yes—I am sure you are in league with those persons."

"In league?—countess, learn one thing, that the king only leagues with kings."

"True—but all your kings are friends of the Duke de Choiseul."

"Let us return to your chaperon, countess."

"With all my heart, sire."

"You have succeeded in manufacturing a lady, then?"

"I found one ready made, and very well made—a Countess de Bearn—a family who have numbered princes among their ranks. She will not dishonour the relative of the relatives of the Stuarts, I hope!"

"The Countess de Bearn!" exclaimed the king, with surprise. "I know only of one, who lives somewhere near Verdun."

"It is the very same—she has come to Paris on purpose to present me."

"Ha! and when is the affair to take place?"

"To-morrow, at eleven o'clock in the morning, I am to give her a private audience, and at the same time, if it be not too presumptuous, she will request the king to name a day—and you will name the earliest—will you not, dear France?"

The king burst into a forced laugh.

"Certainly, certainly," said he, kissing the countess's hand. Then all at once: "To-morrow, at eleven?" added he.

"Yes—at breakfast."

"Impossible! my dear countess."

"Impossible!—why?"

"I shall not breakfast here—I must return this evening."

"What!" said the countess, who felt an icy pang shoot through her heart at these words; "you are going to leave us, sire?"

"I am forced to do so, dear countess—I have to meet Sartines on very important business."

"As you please, sire; but you will at least sup here, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, I shall sup, I think—yes, I am rather hungry—I shall sup."

"Order supper, Chon," said the countess, making at the same time a private signal to her, which no doubt referred to some previous arrangements. Chon left the room. The king had seen the signal in a mirror, and although he could not comprehend its meaning, he suspected some snare.

"Ah!" said he, "on second thoughts I think it will be impossible to stay even for supper—I must not lose a moment—I have some papers to sign—to-day is Saturday."

"As you please, sire—shall I order the horses?"

"Yes, fairest."

"Chon!"

Chon re-appeared.

"His majesty's horses!" said the countess.

"Very well," said Chon, with a smile, and she left the room again.

A moment afterwards her voice was heard in the ante-room, ordering the king's carriage.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE KING IS AMUSED.

THE king, delighted at this exercise of his authority, which punished the countess for leaving him alone so long, at the same time that it freed him from the trouble of settling the affair of her presentation, walked towards the door of the saloon.

Chon entered.

"Well, are my attendants there?"

"No, sire, there is not one of them in the ante-room."

The king advanced into the ante-room himself—"My attendants!" cried he. No one answered; there seemed not to be even an echo in the silent château.

"Who the deuce would believe," said the king, returning to the saloon, "that I am the grandson of the man who once said, 'I was very near having to wait!'" and he went to a window, opened it, and looked out.

The space in front of the château was as deserted as the ante-rooms—no horses, no attendants, no guards. Night alone displayed to the eyes and to the soul all its calmness and all its majesty. The lovely moon shone brightly on the woods of Chatou, whose lofty summits rustled gently like the waves of the sea rippled by a breeze. The Seine, on whose bosom glittered a long line of light, looked like a gigantic serpent trailing its slow length along, its windings being visible from Bougival to Maisons,

that is, for four or five leagues ; and then, in the midst of this heavenly scene, a nightingale burst forth with such a sweet and varied song as she only gives in the month of May, as if she felt that nature was worthy of her music in the early days of spring alone—days which are scarcely come ere they are gone.

All this beauty and harmony were lost on Louis XV.—a king not much of a dreamer, a poet, or an artist, but, on the contrary, a good deal of a sensualist.

"Come, countess !" said he, considerably annoyed, "give the necessary orders, I entreat—what the deuce !—this jest must have an end."

"Sire," replied the countess, with that charming pouting air which became her so well, "I do not command here."

"Nor do I," replied the king, "for you see how I am obeyed."

"It is neither you nor I who command."

"Who is it, then ?—Is it you, Chon ?"

"I ?" said the young lady, who was seated on a couch on the other side of the apartment exactly opposite the countess, who occupied a similar one on the near side—"I find the task of obeying so difficult that I have no inclination for that of commanding."

"But who is the master, then ?"

"The governor, sire, certainly."

"Monsieur Zamore ?"

"Yes."

"Ah, very true ! Well, let some one ring for him."

The countess stretched out her arm with a most graceful air of nonchalance to a silken cord ending in a tassel of beads. A footman, who had no doubt received his lesson beforehand, was ready in the ante-room and appeared.

"The governor," said the king.

"The governor," replied the valet, respectfully, "is on guard, watching over his majesty's precious life."

"Where is he ?"

"Going his rounds, sire."

"Going his rounds ?" repeated the king.

"Yes, with four officers, sire."

The king could not help smiling.

"That is droll enough," said he ; "but it need not prevent my horses from being harnessed immediately."

"Sire, the governor ordered the stables to be closed, lest some marauder might enter them."

"And where are my grooms ?"

"Gone to bed, sire."

"Gone to bed !—by whose orders ?"

"The governor's, sire."

"And the gates of the castle ?"

"Are locked, sire."

"Very well—then you must get the keys."

"The governor has them at his belt, sire."

"A well-guarded castle indeed—Peste ! what order is kept !"

The footman, seeing that the king ceased to question him, retired. The countess, reclining gracefully on a couch, continued to bite off the leaves of a beautiful rose, beside which her lips seemed like coral. "Come, sire," said she at length, with a fascinating smile, "I must take compassion on your majesty—give me your arm and let us set out in search of some one to help you—Chon, light the way."

Chon went before, ready to apprise them of any dangers which they might encounter. At the very first turn in the corridor the king's nose was saluted by an odour quite sufficient to awaken the appetite of the most fastidious epicure.

"Ah, ha! what is that, countess?" said he, stopping.

"Oh, only supper, sire! I thought your majesty intended doing me the honour of supping at Luciennes, and I made arrangements accordingly."

The king inhaled the gastronomic perfume two or three times, whilst he called to mind that his stomach had already given him certain tokens of its existence; then he thought what a fuss there must be before his grooms could be awakened, that would take half an hour at least; a quarter more to harness the horses; ten minutes to reach Marly—and when at Marly, where he was not expected, he should only get a put-off of a supper, All these things passed through his mind as he stood at the dining-room door, inhaling the seductive steam of the viands. Two covers were placed on the table, which was splendidly lighted and sumptuously laid out.

"Peste!" said Louis, "you have a good cook, countess."

"Oh, sire, this is merely his first effort; the poor devil has been doing wonders to deserve your majesty's approbation. Indeed, he is so sensitive, that he might perhaps, in his disappointment, cut his throat, as poor Vatel did."

"Really?—do you think so?"

"There was to be an omelet of pheasants' eggs on which he especially prided himself."

"An omelet of pheasants' eggs?—I adore omelets of pheasants' eggs."

"What a pity you must go."

"Well, countess, we must not vex your cook," said the king, laughing: "and perhaps, whilst we are supping, Master Zamore may return from his rounds."

"Ah! sire, a capital idea," said the countess, unable to conceal her delight at having gained this first step. "Come, sire, come!"

"But who will wait on us?" said the king, looking round in vain for an attendant.

"Ah! sire," said Madame Dubarry, "is your coffee less grateful when presented to you by me?"

"No, countess; and still more when you make it for me."

"Well, come then, sire."

"Two covers only! Has Chon supped, then?"

"Sire, I did not venture without your majesty's express command——"

"Come, come," said the king, taking a plate and cover from a sideboard himself, "come, my little Chon; sit there opposite us."

"Oh, sire!" said Chon.

"Yes, yes! play the very humble and very obedient subject, you little hypocrite. Sit here, countess, near me—beside me. What a beautiful profile you have!"

"Is this the first time you have observed it, dear France?"

"How should I observe it, when I am so happy in looking at your full countenance? Decidedly, countess, your cook is first-rate. What soup!"

"Then I was right in sending away the other?"

"Quite right—quite right."

"Sire, follow my example—you see it will be to your advantage."

"I do not understand you."

"I have turned off my Choiseul—turn off yours."

"Countess, no politics. Give me some Madeira."

The king held out his glass: the countess took up a decanter to help him, and as she raised it up, her white fingers and rosy nails were seen to advantage.

"Pour gently and slowly," said the king.

"Not to shake the wine, sire?"

"No, to give me more time to admire your hand."

"Assuredly, sire," said the countess, laughing; "your majesty is in the vein of making discoveries!"

"Faith, yes," said the king, now in perfect good humour again, "and think I am in the fair way of discovering——"

"A new world."

"No, I am not so ambitious; besides, I find a kingdom as much as I can manage. No, only an isle—a little nook—an enchanted mountain—a palace of which a certain fair lady will be the Armida, and the entrance to which will be defended by all kinds of monsters."

"Sire," said the countess, presenting the king with a glass of iced champagne, a luxury quite new at that period, "here is some water just drawn from the river Lethe."

"The river Lethe, countess? are you sure?"

"Yes, sire; it was poor Jean who brought it from the shades below, from which you know he has just narrowly escaped."

"Countess, I drink to his happy resurrection. But no politics, I beg."

"Then I don't know what to talk about, sire. If you would relate something—you, who have such a happy gift of telling a story."

"No—but I shall repeat you some verses."

"Verses?"

"Yes, verses. Is there anything surprising in that word?"

"I thought your majesty detested them."

"Parbleu! out of each hundred thousand manufactured, ninety thousand are against myself!"

"And those which your majesty is going to give me, belong to the ten thousand which cannot even make you look favourable on the ninety thousand."

"No, countess—these are addressed to you."

"To me? By whom?"

"By M. de Voltaire."

"He charged your majesty to deliver them?"

"Not at all; he sent them direct to your highness."

"How?—without a cover?"

"No; enclosed in a charming letter."

"Ah, I understand; your majesty has been at work this morning with the postmaster. But read the verses, sire; read Monsieur de Voltaire's verses."

Louis XV. opened the paper and read:

"Goddess of pleasure, soft queen of the graces,
Why blend, with the fêtes which make Paphos to ring,
Foul threat'ning suspicions and hideous disgraces—
The fate of a hero, oh! why should'st thou bring?
Still dear our Ulysses his country shall hold,
The State's mighty bulwark—the monarch's delight,
None wiser in council, in battle more bold,
And Ilion can tell how resistless his might!

Fair Venus, thy throne all the gods shall surround,
Thy beauty celestial all tongues shall declare,
The roses of joy in thy path shall abound—
Then calm the rough waters and smile on our prayer.
Ah! why should thy anger burn fiercely and high
'Gainst the hero whom foemen still tremble to meet;
For, how can he draw from such beauty a sigh,
Save in breathing his vows as he kneels at her feet?"

"Decidedly, sire," said the countess, more piqued than gratified by this poetical offering, "Monsieur de Voltaire wishes to recommend himself to your favour."

"He loses his pains, then," said the king. "He is a firebrand who would burn Paris if he returned to it. Let him stay with his friend, my cousin Frederick II.; we can do very well with Monsieur Rousseau. But take the verses, countess, and study them."

She took the paper, made a match of it, and laid it beside her plate.

"Some tokay, sire," said Chon.

"From the vaults which supply his majesty the Emperor of Austria," said the countess.

"From the emperor's vaults?" said the king. "Pardieu! no one is supplied from them but myself."

"Very true, sire," said the countess; "so I had it from your butler."

"Ah!" said the king, "and you have seduced——"

"No, sire, I have *ordered*."

"Well answered, countess! I was a fool."

"Will the king take coffee?" asked Chon.

"Oh, certainly."

"And will his majesty burn it, as usual?" asked the countess.

"If the lady of the castle permit." The countess rose. "But what are you doing?"

"I am going to wait on you myself."

"Well," said the king, leaning back in his chair like a man who had made an excellent supper, and whose humours were, therefore, in a happy state of equilibrium. "Well, I see that my best plan is to let you do as you like, countess."

The countess brought a silver-stand, with a little coffee-pot containing the boiling mocha; she then placed before the king a plate on which was a silver cup and a carafe of Bohemian glass, and beside the plate she laid the match which she had just folded.

The king, with that profound attention which he always bestowed on this operation, calculated his sugar, measured his coffee, and, having gently poured on it the brandy, so that it swam on the surface, he took the little roll of paper, lighted it at a candle, and communicated the flame to the liquor. Five minutes afterwards he enjoyed his coffee with all the delight of a finished epicure.

The countess looked on till he had finished the last drop; then she exclaimed, "Oh, sire, you have burned your coffee with M. de Voltaire's verses. That is a bad omen for the Choiseuls!"

"I was wrong," said he, laughing; "you are not a fairy—you are a demon."

The countess rose.

"Does your majesty wish to know whether the governor has returned?"

"Zamore?—Bah! for what purpose?"

"To allow you to go to Marly, sire."

"True," said the king, making a great effort to rouse himself from that state of comfort in which he found himself. "Well, countess, let us see—let us see!"

The countess made a sign to Chon, who vanished.

The king began his search for Zamore again; but, it must be confessed, with very different feelings from those which had before influenced him. Philosophers say that we behold things either dark or bright, according to the state of our stomachs, and, as kings have stomachs like other men—in general, indeed, not so good as other men, but still communicating the sensation of comfort or discomfort to the rest of the body in the same manner—our king appeared in the most charming humour which it was possible for a king to be in; and his search ended without his discovering Zamore, and without his being displeased at his want of success.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VOLTAIRE AND ROUSSEAU.

AT ten o'clock the next morning, the king, though he had supped so well, began to think of breakfast; but, going to a window, he saw his carriage and all his attendants ready for his departure. Zamore, with folded arms, was giving, or pretending to give, orders.

"What is this, countess?" said he; "are we not to breakfast? One would think you were going to send me away fasting!"

"Heaven forbid, sire! but I thought your majesty had to meet Monsieur de Sartines at Marly."

"Pardieu!" said the king, "could not Sartines be told to come here?—it is so near!"

"Your majesty will do me the honour to believe that that idea occurred to me before your majesty."

"And, besides, the morning is too fine for work; let us breakfast."

"Your majesty must first give me a few signatures for myself."

"For the Countess de Bearn?"

"Yes; and then name the day and the hour."

"What day and hour?"

"The day and hour for my presentation."

"Ma foi!" said the king, "it must be so, I suppose; fix the day yourself."

"Sire, the sooner the better."

"Is all ready?"

"Yes."

"You have learned to make your three curtseys?"

"I have practised them for more than a year."

"You have your dress?"

"In twenty-four hours it will be ready."

"And you have your chaperon?"

"In an hour she will be here."

"And now, countess, for a bargain!"

"What is it?"

"That you will never again speak of that affair of the Viscount Jean with the Baron de Taverney."

"Must I sacrifice the poor viscount?"

"Yes, faith!"

"Well, sire, I shall speak no more of it. The day?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"The hour?"

"Half-past ten at night, as usual."

"It is settled?"

"It is settled."

"On your royal word?"

"On the word of a gentleman."

"Give me your hand on it, France!" and Madame Dubarry held out her pretty little hand, in which the king placed his own.

This morning all Luciennes felt the gaiety of its master. He had yielded on one point on which he had long before determined to yield; but then he had gained another. This was certainly a decided advantage. He would give one hundred thousand crowns to Jean on condition that he went to drink the waters of the Pyrénées, in Auvergne; that would pass for banishment in the eyes of the Choiseul party. There were louis-d'ors that morning for the poor, cakes for the carps, and praises for Boucher's paintings.

Eleven o'clock struck. The countess, although attending assiduously to the king at his breakfast, could not help looking, from time to time, at the clock, which moved too slowly for her wishes. His majesty had taken the trouble to say, that when the Countess de Bearn arrived, she was to be shown into the breakfast-room. The coffee was served, tasted, drunk, still she came not. Suddenly the tramping of a horse's feet was heard. The countess ran to a window. It was a messenger from the viscount, who leaped from his horse reeking with foam. At sight of him she felt a chill run through her veins, for she knew all could not be right; but it was necessary to hide her uneasiness in order to keep the king in good humour. She returned to his side and sat down.

A moment afterwards, Chon entered with a note in her hand. There was no means of escape; it must be read before the king.

"What is that, sweet Chon?" said the king; "a love-letter?"

"Oh, certainly, sire."

"From whom?"

"From the poor viscount."

"Are you quite certain?"

"Look at it, sire."

The king recognised the writing, and thinking the note might contain something about the Lachaussée affair, "Very well," said he, pushing it aside, "very well—that is enough."

The countess was on thorns.

"Is the note for me?" she asked.

"Yes, countess."

"Will your majesty permit me——"

"Oh, yes—read it—read it; and, in the meantime, Chon will repeat 'Maître Corbeau' to me." So saying, he pulled her on his knee, and began to sing—sadly out of tune, indeed—for Rousseau has recorded that Louis had the worst ear in his kingdom.

The countess retired into the recess of a window, and read the following epistle:

"Do not expect the old wretch; she pretends that she scalded her foot yesterday, and is obliged to keep her room. You may thank Chon's most

opportune arrival yesterday for this. The old wretch recognised her immediately, and so put an end to our little comedy.

"It was fortunate that that little wretch, Gilbert, who is the cause of this misfortune, was lost. I would have wrung his neck about! However, he may be assured it is in store for him, if ever he cross my path.

"But to return to the point—come to Paris at once, or we are lost.

"JEAN."

"What is the matter?" inquired the king, surprised at the sudden paleness which overspread the countess's face.

"Nothing, sire; it is only a bulletin of Jean's health."

"Does not the dear viscount get better, then?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, sire, much better," said the countess. "But I hear a carriage enter the courtyard."

"Oh, our old countess, I suppose!"

"No, sire, it is M. de Sartines."

"Well, what then?" exclaimed the king, seeing that Madame Dubarry was moving towards the door.

"Well, sire, I shall leave you with him and go to dress."

"And what about the Countess de Bearn?"

"When she comes, sire, I shall let your majesty know," replied the countess, crumpling the viscount's note in the pocket of her dressing-gown.

"Then you abandon me?" said the king, with a melancholy air.

"Sire, remember this is Sunday; you have papers to sign." So saying she presented her fresh and rosy cheeks to the king, who kissed them, and she left the room.

"Devil take all signatures," said the king, "and those who bring them! Who was it that invented ministers and portfolios?"

He had scarcely finished this malediction, when the minister and the portfolio entered by a door opposite that by which the countess had departed. The king sighed again, more deeply than before.

"Ah! are you there, Sartines?" said he. "How very punctual you are."

This was said in a tone which left it very doubtful whether the words were intended as a eulogium or a reproach.

The minister opened his portfolio, and busied himself in taking out and arranging his papers. Just then the sound of the wheels of a carriage was heard, grating on the sand of the avenue.

"Wait a little, Sartines," said the king, and he ran to the window.

"What!" said he, "the countess is driving off!"

"It is she, indeed, sire," said the minister.

"But is she not going to wait for the Countess de Bearn?"

"Sire, I am inclined to think she is tired of waiting, and goes to find her."

"Yet the old lady had decided on coming this morning."

"Sire, I am almost certain that she will not come."

"Then you know something about the matter, Sartines?"

"Sire, I am obliged to know a little about everything, otherwise your majesty would be dissatisfied with me."

"Well, what has happened? Tell me, Sartines."

"To the old countess, sire?"

"Yes."

"A very common case, sire—difficulties have arisen."

"Then the Countess de Bearn really will not come?"

"Hum! there was rather more certainty of it yesterday evening than there is this morning."

"Poor countess!" said the king, unable, in spite of himself, to conceal a gleam of satisfaction which sparkled in his eyes.

"Ah, sire, the quadruple alliance and the family compact were trifles in comparison with this presentation!"

"Poor countess!" repeated the king, shaking his head, "she will never accomplish her purpose."

"I fear it, sire, unless your majesty concerns yourself about it."

"She was so certain that now all was in the right train."

"And what makes the matter worse for the countess," said M. de Sartines, "is, that if she be not presented before the arrival of the dauphiness, it is probable she never will be presented at all."

"More than probable! Sartines, you are right. They say that my daughter-in-law is very strict, very devout, very prudish. Poor countess!"

"It will certainly annoy her very much, sire, if she be not presented; but, on the other hand, it will relieve your majesty from many annoyances."

"Do you think so, Sartines?"

"Oh yes, sire! The envious, the libellers, the ballad-mongers, the flatterers, the journalists, will not have so much to say. If she was presented, sire, it would cost us at least one hundred thousand francs additional for the police."

"Indeed——? poor countess! and yet she wishes so much to be presented."

"Your majesty knows you have only to command, and her wishes will be gratified."

"What do you mean, Sartines? Do you imagine that I could meddle in such an affair? Can I, by signing an order, make people polite to Madame Dubarry? Is it you, Sartines, a man of sense, who advise such an innovation to satisfy the whims of the countess?"

"Oh, by no means, sire! I merely say, as your majesty says, poor countess!"

"Besides," said the king, "her position is not so desperate, after all. You always look at things on the dark side, Sartines. Who can tell whether the Countess de Bearn may not change her mind? Who can be certain that the dauphiness will arrive so soon? It will take four days yet before she can reach Compiègne, and in four days much may be done. Let me see. Have you anything for me to do this morning, Sartines?"

"Oh, your majesty, only three papers to sign;" and the minister of police drew out the first from his portfolio.

"Oh!" said the king, "a lettre-de-cachet."

"Yes, sire."

"And against whom!"

"Your majesty may see."

"Oh! against the Sieur Rousseau? What Rousseau is that, Sartines, and what has he done?"

"Done, sire!—written *Le Contrat Social*."

"Oh, then, it is Jean-Jacques whom you wish to shut up in the Bastille?"

"Sire, he disturbs the public peace."

"And what the deuce did you expect he would do?"

"Besides, I don't propose to shut him up."

"Of what use is this letter, then?"

"Sire, merely to have a weapon ready."

"—Not that I am at all fond of your philosophers, mark ye."

"Your majesty has good cause not to love them."

"But people will exclaim against us. Besides, I think we authorised him to come to Paris."

"No, sire; we said we should tolerate him on condition that he did not appear in public."

"And does he appear in public?"

"He is always to be seen."

"In his Armenian dress?"

"Oh no, sire. We ordered him to lay it aside."

"And he obeyed?"

"Yes, but complaining loudly all the time of our persecution."

"And how does he dress now?"

"Oh, like other people, sire."

"Then he cannot be so much remarked?"

"What, sire! a man who has been forbidden to appear in public not remarked! And then, only guess where he goes every day!"

"To the Marshal de Luxembourg's, to Monsieur d'Alembert's, to Madame d'Epinay's?"

"To the Café de la Régence, sire! He plays chess there every evening. He must be mad upon that point, for he always loses; and it requires every evening a company of soldiers to keep order among the crowds around the house."

"Well," said the king, "the Parisians are even greater fools than I thought them. Let them go on amusing themselves in that way, Sartines; while they do so, they will not shout starvation!"

"But, sire, if some fine day he should take it into his head to make a speech, as he did in London?"

"Oh! in that case, as there would be criminality and public infringement of the laws, you would not require a lettre-de-cachet, Sartines."

The minister saw that the king did not wish the arrest of Rousseau to rest on the royal responsibility, so he did not press the matter farther.

"But, sire," said he, "there is another philosopher."

"Another!" replied the king, languidly, "shall we never have done with them?"

"Ah, sire, it is they who have never done with us!"

"And who is this one?"

"Monsieur de Voltaire."

"Has he also returned to France?"

"No, sire; it would be much better. perhaps, that he had, for then we could watch him."

"What has he been doing?"

"It is not he who has been doing anything, it is his partisans; they are actually going to have a statue erected in his honour!"

"Equestrian, I suppose?"

"No, sire; and yet I assure you he is a famous captor of towns!"

The king shrugged his shoulders.

"Sire, there has not been seen such a one since Poliorcetes," continued Sartines. "He obtains information from all quarters; his writings reach all quarters; the highest persons in your kingdom turn smugglers for the sake of his books. I seized, the other day, eight boxes full of them; two were addressed to the Duke de Choiseul."

"It is very amusing!"

"Sire, only reflect that they are now doing for him what is only done for kings—they are decreeing him a statue."

"Sartines, statues are not decreed by others for kings, they decree them to themselves. And who is to make this fine work of art?"

"The sculptor Pigale. He has set out for Ferney to execute the model. In the meantime, subscriptions are pouring in; and observe, sire, it is only authors who are permitted to subscribe. All come with their offerings; they make quite a procession every day. Even Rousseau brought his two louis-d'ors."

"Well," said the king, "what can I do in the matter? I am not an author, it does not concern me."

"Sire, I thought of proposing to your majesty to put an end, by royal command, to this demonstration."

"I shall take good care not to do any such thing, Sartines. Instead of decreeing him a bronze statue, they would then decree him one of gold. Let them alone. Mon Dieu! he will look even uglier in bronze than in flesh and blood!"

"Then your majesty desires that the matter should take its own course!"

"Let us understand one another, Sartines! Desire is not the word. I should be very glad to put an end to these things, certainly; but how can I?—it is impossible. The time is past when royalty could say to the spirit of philosophy, as God says to the ocean, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther!' To blame loudly but uselessly; to aim a blow, but strike short of our aim; that would only serve to show our own weakness. Let us turn away our eyes, Sartines, and pretend not to see."

The minister sighed.

"At least, sire," said he, "if we do not punish the men, let us suppress their works. Here is a list of books which, in my opinion, should instantly be proscribed; some attack the throne, some the altar; some teach rebellion, others sacrilege."

The king took the list, and read in a languid voice—

"*The Sacred Contagion; or, the Natural History of Superstition.*

"*The System of Nature; or, Laws of the Physical and Moral World.*

"*Instructions of the Capuchin at Ragusa, to Brother Pediculoso, on his setting out for the Holy Land.*"

He had not read one-fourth of the list, when he let it fall, whilst an expression of sadness and dejection overspread his usually unmoved countenance. He remained thoughtful, and for some minutes seemed quite overcome.

"Sartines," said he at last, "one might as well undertake to move the world. Let others try it."

The minister looked at him with that perfect understanding of his wishes which the king loved in those who approached him, as it saved him the trouble of thinking and acting.

"A tranquil life, sire," said he, "a tranquil life—is not that what your majesty wishes?"

The king nodded.

"Oh, yes!" said he. "I ask for nothing else from your philosophers, encyclopedists, thaumaturgi, illuminati, poets, economists, journalists—tribes that come one knows not whence—that are always bustling, writing, croaking, calumniating, calculating, preaching, complaining. Let them be crowned—let statues be raised to them—let temples be built to them—but let them leave me in peace."

Sartines arose, bowed, and left the apartment, muttering, as he went, "It is fortunate we have on our money—'Domine salvum fac regem.'"

Then the king, now left to himself, took a pen, and wrote to the dauphin the following lines:

'You have requested me to hasten the arrival of her royal highness the dauphiness, and I wish to gratify you.

"I have ordered that there shall be no stay made at Noyon—consequently, on Tuesday morning she will be at Compiègne.

"I shall be there myself precisely at ten o'clock—that is to say, a quarter of an hour before her."

"Thus," said he to himself, "I shall get rid of that foolish affair of the presentation, which annoys me more than Voltaire and Rousseau, and all the philosophers, past, present, and to come. The affair will then be between the poor countess, the dauphin and dauphiness. Ma foi, it is only fair that young minds, with strength for it, should contend with these vexations, hatreds, and revenges! Children should early learn to suffer—it is an excellent part of education."

Delighted at having thus got rid of the difficulty, and certain that he would not be reproached with either favouring or hindering this presentation, about which all Paris was occupied, the king entered his carriage and drove off to Marly, where the court was waiting for him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CHAPERON AND DEBUTANTE.

THE poor countess—let us continue to apply the epithet which the king had given her, for at this moment she truly deserved it—the poor countess hurried like one in despair to Paris. Chon, terrified by Jean's paragraph concerning Gilbert, shut herself up in the boudoir at Luciennes to hide her grief and anxiety, lamenting the fatal whim which induced her to pick up Gilbert on the high road.

Having reached the outskirts of Paris, the countess found a coach awaiting her. In the coach were Viscount Jean and a lawyer, with whom he seemed to be arguing in the most energetic manner. The moment he perceived the countess he leaped out, and made a sign to his sister's coachman to stop.

"Quick, countess!" said he. "Quick, get into my carriage, and drive to the Rue Saint-Germain-des-Près!"

"Is the old lady going to give us the slip?" said Madame Dubarry, changing carriages, while the lawyer, on a sign from the viscount, followed her example.

"I fear it, countess," replied Jean. "I fear she is giving us a Roland for our Oliver."

"But what has happened?"

"You shall hear. I stayed in Paris because I am always suspicious, and in this case I was not wrong, as you will see. At nine last night I went prowling about the inn of the Coq Chantant. All quiet—no movement—no visitors: all looked well. Consequently, I thought I might go home to bed—and to bed I went. This morning I awoke at break of day. I roused Patrice, and ordered him to go and keep watch at the corner of the street. Well, at nine—observe, that was an hour sooner than I had appointed—I drove up to the hotel. Patrice had seen nothing to cause the least anxiety, so I boldly walked upstairs. At the door of the countess's room a maid-servant stopped me, and told me that the countess

could not leave the house to-day, and perhaps it would be eight days before she could move from her apartment. I confess that, although prepared for some rebuff, I was not for that! 'What,' cried I, 'she cannot go out! What is the matter?' 'She is ill.' 'Ill? Impossible! Yesterday she was perfectly well.' 'Yes, sir, but madame likes to make her own chocolate; and this morning, when it was boiling, she spilled it over her foot, and she is scalded. On hearing the countess's cries I hastened in, and I found her nearly fainting. I carried her to her bed, and I think she is at present asleep.' I was as white as your lace, countess, and could not help crying out, 'It is a lie!' 'No, my dear Viscount Dubarry,' replied a sharp voice, which seemed to pierce the very wall, 'it is not a lie! I am in horrible pain.' I sprang to the side whence the voice came, and burst through a glass door which I could not open—the old countess was really in bed. 'Ah, madame!' I exclaimed—but it was all I could utter; I was in such a rage! I could have strangled her with pleasure. 'Look there,' said she, pointing to an old kettle which was lying on the floor, 'there is the coffee-pot that did all the mischief.' I flew to the coffee-pot, and stamped on it with both feet; it will make no more chocolate, I can answer for it. 'What a misfortune!' cried the old lady, piteously; 'it must be the Baroness d'Alogny who will present your sister. But what can we do? It was so written, as the Easterns say.'"

"Heavens! Jean, you drive me to despair!" exclaimed the countess.

"Oh! I do not despair yet, if you go to her; it was for that that I sent for you."

"But why do you not despair?"

"Why! because you are a woman, and can do what I cannot; you can make the dressing be taken off; and, if you discover that it is an imposture, you can tell her that her son shall never be anything but a clown—that she shall never touch a farthing from the estate of the Saluces—in short, you can play off the imprecations of Camilla on her, much better than I the fury of Orestes."

"Is this all a jest?" cried the countess.

"No, I assure you."

"And where does our sibyl lodge?"

"At the Coq Chantant, Rue Saint-Germain-des-Près, a great black house, with a monstrous cock painted on an iron plate—when the iron creaks, the cock crows."

"I shall have a dreadful scene with her."

"No doubt of it; but you must take your chance. Shall I go with you?"

"No; you would spoil all."

"Just what our lawyer said; I was consulting him on that point when you drove up. For your information, I may tell you that he says to beat a person in his own house renders you liable to fine and imprisonment, while to beat him out of it——"

"Is nothing!" said the countess. "You know that better than any one else."

Jean grinned an ugly smile.

"Debts," said he, "that are long in being paid, are paid with interest; and if ever I meet my man again——"

"I would much rather, at present, speak of my woman!"

"I have nothing more to tell you, so be off!"

"But where will you wait for me?"

"In the inn itself. I shall ask for a bottle of wine, and sit there, in case you want a helping hand."

"Drive on, coachman," cried the countess.

"Rue Saint-Germain-des-Près, at the sign of the Coq Chantant," added the viscount.

In a quarter of an hour they were in the street honoured by possessing the Coq Chantant. At some distance from the inn Madame Dubarry left her carriage and proceeded on foot. She feared that the noise of the wheels might put the old lady on the alert—that she might suspect what visitor was coming—and might have time to hide.

Alone, then, she entered the gaping porch of the inn. No one saw her until she was at the foot of the staircase: there she encountered the hostess.

"The Countess de Bearn?" said she.

"She is very ill, madame, and cannot see any one.

"Yes, I am aware; and I came to know exactly how she is."

And, light as a bird, she was at the top of the stairs in a moment.

"Madame, madame!" cried the hostess, "a lady is going to force her way into your room."

"Who is she?" asked the old lady, from a distant part of the room.

"I," said the favourite, appearing on the threshold with a face perfectly suited to the occasion, for she first smiled out of compliment, and then looked sad, by way of condolence.

"You here, madame?" exclaimed the old lady, turning pale.

"Yes, dear madame, I came to express my sympathy for your misfortune, of which I have just heard. Pray tell me how this accident happened."

"But, madame, I dare not ask you to sit down in such a miserable place as this."

"I know, madame, that you have a castle in Touraine, and can excuse your being obliged to receive your friends here in an inn." And she sat down so determinedly that the old lady saw she must allow her to have her way.

"You seem in great pain, madame," said the favourite.

"Oh, in dreadful pain!"

"The right leg? But, good heavens, how did you manage to scald it?"

"Nothing more simple—I held the chocolate kettle in my hand, the handle gave way, and I received the boiling water on my ankle."

"How shocking!"

The old lady sighed. "Yes, shocking, indeed," said she; "but this is always the case; misfortunes never come singly."

"You are aware that the king expected you this morning?"

"Oh! madame, that intelligence makes my sufferings infinitely greater."

"His majesty is far from satisfied, madame, that you did not pay your visit."

"But the pain I am in will be a sufficient apology; and I trust yet to be able to offer to his majesty my very humble excuses."

"I do not tell you that, to cause you any vexation," said the countess, seeing that the old lady was assuming a little formality, "but merely to let you know that his majesty felt grateful for the offer you made me."

"You see, madame, that it is now impossible for me to fulfil it."

"Certainly; but may I ask you a question?"

"I shall be delighted to hear it."

"Does not your present state arise from your having experienced some sudden agitation?"

"Very possibly," said the old lady, bowing slightly; "I must acknowledge that I was deeply moved by your gracious reception of me."

"Yes; but there was another thing besides."

"Another thing? nothing that I know of, madame."

"Oh, yes; an unexpected meeting with a person on leaving my house."

"I did not meet any one; I was in your brother's carriage."

"Before getting into the carriage?"

The old lady seemed to be tasking her memory.

"Just as you were going down the stairs to the vestibule?"

The old lady seemed more intent in trying to recall the events of yesterday.

"Yes," said the favourite, rather impatiently; "some one entered the court as you left my house."

"I am so unfortunate, madame, as not to be able to recollect any one entering."

"A lady—now you remember."

"I am so short-sighted that at two paces from me, madame, I cannot distinguish any one."

"Oh, ho!" said the favourite to herself; "she is too cunning for me! I shall never succeed by these means. Come—to the point at once. Then since you did not see the lady," she continued aloud, "I must tell you that she is my sister-in-law, Mademoiselle Dubarry."

"Oh, very well, madame; but as I have never had the pleasure of seeing her——"

"Yes," interrupted the other, "you have seen her—only when you saw her it was under the name of Flageot."

"So!" cried the old lady, with a bitterness which she could not dissemble —"So that pretended Mademoiselle Flageot, who caused me to undertake the journey to Paris, is your sister-in-law?"

"She is, madame."

"And who sent her to me?"

"I did."

"To mystify me?"

"No, to serve you, whilst at the same time you should serve me."

The old lady bent her thick grey eyebrows. "I do not think," said she, "her visit will turn out very profitable to me."

"Did the vice-chancellor receive you ill, then, madame?"

"Empty promises."

"But it seems to me that I offered you something more tangible than promises."

"Madame, God disposes, though man proposes."

"Come, madame, let us view the matter seriously. You have scalded your foot!"

"Scalded it very badly."

"Could you not, in spite of this accident—painful, no doubt, but after all, nothing dangerous—make an effort to bear the journey to Luciennes in my carriage, and stand before his majesty for one minute?"

"It is quite impossible, madame."

"Is the injury so very serious?"

"Serious, indeed."

"And pray who dresses it for you, and nurses you?"

"Like all housekeepers, I have excellent receipts for burns, and I dress it myself."

"Might I take the liberty of requesting to see your specific?"

"Oh yes, it is in that phial on the table."

"Hypocrite!" thought the countess, "to carry her dissimulation to such a point! She is as cunning as a fox, but I shall match her. Madame," added she, aloud; "I also have an excellent oil for accidents of this kind; but, before applying it, it is necessary to know what kind of scald it is—whether it is inflamed, or blistered, or the skin broken."

"Madame, the skin is broken," said the old lady.

"Oh, heavens! how you must suffer. Shall I apply my oil to it?"

"With all my heart, madame. Have you brought it?"

"No, but I shall send for it. In the meantime, I must see the state of your leg."

"Oh, madame!" exclaimed the old lady, "I could not think of permitting you to see such a spectacle. I know too well what is due to good manners."

"Delightful!" thought Madame Dubarry, "she is now fairly caught." Then she added, "Where we can serve our fellow-beings, madame, we must not stand upon etiquette," and she stretched out her hand towards the old lady's leg, which was extended on the sofa.

Madame de Bearn uttered a scream of pain.

"Very well acted," said Madame Dubarry to herself, watching her every feature distorted with anguish.

"How you frightened me, madame," said the old lady; "it is almost death to me to touch it;" and, with pale cheeks and half-closed eyes, she leaned back as if nearly fainting.

"Do you allow me to look at it?"

"If you choose, madame," said the old lady, in a weak and suffering voice.

Madame Dubarry did not lose an instant; she took out the pins in the bandages, and rapidly unrolled them. To her great surprise, she was permitted to go on. "When it comes to the last covering," thought she, "she will scream, and try to prevent me from seeing it; but, though she kill herself calling on me to stop, I will see the leg!" and she proceeded in her task.

Madame de Bearn groaned, but offered no resistance.

At last the bandages were untied, the last covering was removed, and a real wound caused by a scald lay before Madame Dubarry's eyes. Here ended the old lady's diplomacy. Livid and inflamed, the wound spoke for itself. The Countess de Bearn might have seen and recognised Chon; but if so, her courage and determination raised her far above Portia and Mutius Scevola. Madame Dubarry gazed at her in silent admiration. The old lady, now somewhat recovered, enjoyed her victory to the utmost; her inflamed eye brooded with satisfaction on the countess kneeling at her feet. Madame Dubarry replaced the bandages with that delicate care which women exercise towards the suffering, placed the limb once more on its cushion, and took her seat beside the couch.

"Come, madame," said she, "I see of what you are capable, and I beg your pardon for not having begun this subject in the way in which I ought with such a woman as you. Make your own conditions."

The eyes of the old lady sparkled, but it was only for a moment. "In the first place," said she, "state what your wishes are, and then I shall see if I can be of any service to you."

"Madame, I wish to be presented at Versailles by you, though it cost you another hour of the horrible suffering which you have endured this morning."

The Countess de Bearn listened unflinchingly. "Anything else, madame?" said she.

"That is all. Now for your turn."

"I must have," replied Madame de Bearn, with a decision which showed clearly that she treated with the countess as one power with another, "I must have the two hundred thousand francs of my lawsuit secured to me."

"But if you gain your cause, you will then have four hundred thousand."

"No; for I look on the disputed two hundred thousand as mine already, and the other two hundred thousand I shall reckon as merely an additional piece of good fortune to that of possessing the honour of your acquaintance."

"You shall have them, madame—well?"

"I have a son, whom I love tenderly, madame. Our house has already been distinguished by military genius; but, born to command, we make but indifferent subalterns. My son must have a company immediately, and next year a colonel's commission."

"Who will pay all the necessary expenses, madame?"

"The king. You perceive that if I expended on my son the sum which I am to receive from you, I should be as poor to-morrow as I am to-day."

"At the lowest, I may reckon that at six hundred thousand francs."

"Four hundred thousand, supposing the commission worth two hundred thousand, which is a high estimate."

"This shall be granted you also."

"I have now to request from the king payment for a vineyard in Touraine, containing four acres, which the engineers deprived me of eleven years ago in making a canal."

"But they paid you then?"

"Yes, they paid me according to the valuator's estimate; but I value it at just double the sum."

"Well, you shall be paid a second time. Is that all?"

"Excuse me. I am out of cash, as you may suppose, madame, and I owe Master Flageot something about nine thousand francs."

"Nine thousand francs!"

"Yes; it is absolutely necessary to pay him; he is an excellent lawyer."

"I have not the least doubt of it, madame. Well, I shall pay these nine thousand francs out of my own private purse. I hope you will acknowledge that I am accommodating."

"Perfectly accommodating. But I think I have also proved that I wish to serve you."

"I have only to regret that you scalded yourself," replied the favourite, with a smile.

"I do not regret it, madame, since, in spite of the accident, my devotion to your interests will, I trust, give me strength to be useful to you."

"Let us sum up," said Madame Dubarry.

"Pardon me one moment. I had forgotten one thing. Alas, it is so long since I have been at court that I have no dress fit for it."

"I foresaw that, madame, and yesterday, after your departure, I ordered a dress for you. To-morrow, at noon, it will be ready."

"I have no diamonds."

"Bœmer and Bossange will give you to-morrow, on my order, a set of ornaments worth two hundred and ten thousand livres, which, the following day, they will take back at two hundred thousand. Thus your indemnity will be paid."

"Very well, madame; I have nothing more to wish."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"However, about my son's commission?"

"His majesty will give it you himself."

"And for the attendant expenses?"

"The order will be given with the commission."

"Quite right. There now only remains about the vineyard—four acres——"

"How much were they worth?"

"Six thousand livres an acre; it was excellent land."

"I will now subscribe an obligation to pay you twenty-four thousand livres, which will be about the whole."

"There is the writing-desk, madame."

"I shall do myself the honour to hand the desk to you."

"To me?"

"Yes, that you may write a little letter to his majesty which I shall dictate—a fair return, you know."

"Very true," replied the old lady; and arranging her paper, and taking a pen, she waited. Madame Dubarry dictated:

"SIRE,—The happiness which I feel on learning that your majesty has accepted my offer to present my dear friend the Countess Dubarry——"

The old lady made a grimace, and her pen began to spit.

"You have a bad pen," said the favourite; "you must change it."

"It is unnecessary, madame; I shall get accustomed to it."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

Madame Dubarry continued:

—"Emboldens me to solicit your majesty to look on me with a favourable eye, when I shall appear at Versailles to-morrow, as you have deigned to permit me to do. I venture to hope, sire, that I merit your majesty's favour, inasmuch as I am allied to a house, every chief of which has shed his blood for the princes of your august race."

"Now sign, if you please," said the favourite.

And the countess signed:

"ANASTASIE EUPHEMIE RODOLPHE,
COUNTESS DE BEARN."

The old lady wrote with a firm hand, in great letters, half-an-inch long, and sprinkled her letter with a sufficient quantity of aristocratic mistakes in orthography.

When she had signed, still holding the letter fast with one hand, she passed with the other the paper, pen and ink to Madame Dubarry, who in a little straight sharp hand signed the obligation to pay the sums above stated.

Then she wrote a letter to Bœmer and Bossange, the crown jewellers, requesting them to give the bearer the set of diamond and emerald ornaments called *Louise*, because they had belonged to the Princess Louise, aunt to the dauphin, who sold them to obtain funds for her charities.

That done, the ladies exchanged their papers.

"Now," said Madame Dubarry, "give me a proof of your friendship, my dear countess."

"With all my heart, madame."

"I am sure that if you come to me, Tronchin will cure you in less than three days. Come then, and you can at the same time try my oil, which is really excellent."

"Well, but do not let me detain you, madame," said the prudent old lady; "I have some matters to settle here before I can set out."

"Then you refuse me?"

"On the contrary, madame, I accept your invitation, but not at this moment. It is just now striking one o'clock by the abbey clock; give me until three, and at five precisely I shall be at Luciennes."

"Permit my brother then to return with the carriage at three."

"Certainly."

"In the meantime take care of yourself."

"Fear nothing; you have my word, and though my death should be the consequence, I shall present you to-morrow at Versailles."

"Good-bye, then, my dear madame."

"Good-bye, my charming friend."

And so saying they parted, the old lady, with her foot still on the cushion, and her hand on her papers; the countess in better spirits than on her arrival, but certainly rather vexed that she had not been able to make better terms with an old woman from the country—she, who could outwit the King of France when she chose.

Passing by the door of the principal saloon, she saw Jean, who, doubtless merely to prevent any one harbouring suspicions as to the cause of his long stay, was taking a second bottle of wine. Perceiving his sister, he jumped up from his chair and ran after her.

"Well?" cried he.

"Well, I may say as Marshal Saxe once said to his majesty in the battlefield of Fontenoy, 'Sire, learn from this spectacle how dearly a victory may be purchased.'"

"Then we have conquered?"

"Yes—only it costs us about a million."

Jean made a frightful grimace.

"Why, I had no chance; I must either take her at that or give her up."

"But it is abominable."

"It is as I tell you; and perhaps, if you make her angry, she will make us pay double."

"Pardieu! what a woman!"

"She is a Roman!"

"She is a Greek!"

"Never mind! Greek or Roman, be ready to bring her to Luciennes at three o'clock. I shall never be easy until I have her under lock and key."

"I shall not stir from this," said Jean.

"And I, on my side, shall hasten to prepare everything," said the countess.

She sprang into her carriage.

"To Luciennes!" said she. "To-morrow I shall say, to Marly!"

Jean followed the carriage with his eyes. "We cost France a pretty little sum," said he. "No matter! it is very flattering for the Dubarrics!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MARSHAL RICHELIEU'S FIFTH CONSPIRACY.

THE king returned to hold his court at Marly as usual. Less the slave of etiquette than Louis XIV., who sought, even in the evening parties of his courtiers, means of exhibiting his power, Louis XV. sought in them only news, of which he was inordinately fond, and, above all, a variety of faces around him, a gratification which he preferred to all others, particularly if they were smiling ones.

In the evening of the day on which the interview just related took place, and two hours after the Countess de Bearn (who this time kept her promise faithfully) was comfortably installed in Madame Dubarry's cabinet, the king was playing cards at Marly, in the blue drawing-room. On his left sat the Duchess d'Ayen, on his right the Princess de Guemenée. His majesty appeared very absent, losing, in consequence of inattention to his game, eight hundred louis-d'ors. Rather sobered by his loss—for, like a true descendant of Henry IV., Louis loved to win—the king left his cards, and retired into the recess of a window to talk to Monsieur de Malesherbes, son of the ex-chancellor, whilst Monsieur de Maupeou, who was conversing with the Duke de Choiseul in an opposite window, watched the interview with an anxious eye. In the meantime, after the king left the card-table, a circle was formed near the fire-place. The Princesses Adelaide, Sophie, and Victoire, attended by their ladies of honour and their equerries, had placed themselves there on their return from a walk in the gardens.

Around the king, who must certainly have been talking of some matter of importance, as the gravity of Monsieur de Malesherbes was well known, were grouped, but at a respectful distance, generals, admirals, great dignitaries of the state, noblemen, and judges. The little court at the fire-place, therefore, was left a good deal to itself, and seemed bent on more lively conversation, if one might judge by the skirmishing with which they began.

The principal bodies of the group, besides the three princesses, were the Duchess de Grammont, the Princess de Guemenée, the Duchess de Choiseul, the Marchioness de Mirepoix, and the Duchess de Polastron.

At the moment when we approach this group, the Princess Adelaide had just ended an anecdote of a bishop banished from his diocese by the grand penitentiary. It was tolerably scandalous, and it is as well unrelated here.

"Well," said the Princess Victoire, "it is only a month since that bishop was sitting here among us!"

"Oh, we shall have worse than he sitting among us," said the Duchess de Grammont, "if his majesty receive those who, not having been yet received, are now determined to be received."

Every one understood from the tone in which these words were uttered who was meant, and at once felt what turn the conversation was taking.

"Fortunately, wishing to be received, and being received, are two different things, duchess," said a little elderly man, joining in the conversation. He was seventy-four years of age, but looked only fifty, so elegant was his shape, his voice so unbroken, his leg so well shaped, his eye so lively, his skin so fair, and his hand so beautiful.

"Ah, here is M. de Richelieu," said the duchess, "advancing his scaling ladders, and going to take our conversation by assault, as he did Mahon. Still something of the soldier, my dear marshal!"

"Still *something* of the soldier! Ah! duchess, you are very severe!"

"Well! But did I not speak the truth?"

"The truth! When?"

"Just now, when I said that a certain person wished to force the king's doors?"

"Oh, you know, countess, I am always of your opinion, even when you speak ill of all my friends!"

Some laughed, although it had already been whispered that the marshal's wit was on the wane.

"If you say such things," continued the duchess, "I shall not go on with my history, and you will lose a great deal, I assure you."

"Heaven forbid that I should interrupt it! I am all attention!"

The circle drew closer around the duchess. She cast a glance towards the window to be certain that the king was still there. He was still in the same position; but, although he continued to converse with Monsieur de Malesherbes, he kept a watchful eye on the group at the fireplace, and just at that moment his eye met that of Madame de Grammont. The duchess felt somewhat intimidated by its expression, but she had made a beginning, and would not be stopped.

"You must know," she continued, addressing herself particularly to the three princesses, "that a certain lady—her name is of no consequence, is it?—has lately taken it into her head that she will see us, the privileged of the land, sitting in our glory."

"See us—where?" asked the marshal.

"Oh, at Versailles, at Marly, at Fontainebleau."

"Very well—very well!"

"The poor creature knows nothing of our meetings except from having seen, with the rest of the mob, the king at dinner with his guests. How disagreeable, with a barrier between them and the great, and an usher with his rod driving them before him!"

The marshal took stuff noisily out of his box of Sevres porcelain. "But," said he, "in order to join our circle at Versailles, at Marly, at Fontainebleau, one must be presented."

"Precisely; the lady in question has requested to be presented."

"Then I'll wager the king has consented; he is so kind."

"Unfortunately, something more is necessary than the king's permission; there must be a chaperon to present *the lady*."

"Yes; but chaperons are rather scarce," said the Marchiones de Mirepoix, "witness the fair Bourbonnais, who has sought but has not found one."

"Pardon me," replied the duchess; "she has sought so well that she has found what she wants. But what a chaperon! a frank, sincere, real, country dame! She was brought away from her dovecot, petted, and caressed, and dressed——"

"It is perfectly shocking," interrupted the Princess de Guemenée, "but just when the dear dame had been sufficiently petted, and caressed, and dressed, she fell downstairs from the top to the bottom and broke her leg."

"So there can be no presentation?" exclaimed the Princess de Guemenée.

"Not a shadow," said the duchess.

"See how gracious Providence is!" said the marshal, raising his hands and eyes to heaven.

"Gracious!" said the Princess Victoire, "not to the poor country dame; I really pity her."

"On the contrary, your royal highness may congratulate her," said the duchess; "of two evils she has chosen the least." She stopped short, for again her eye met the king's.

"If the ladies who have been presented," said the Princess de Guemenée, "were courageous and faithful to the sentiments of honour of the ancient nobility of France, they would go in a body to return thanks to the lady from the country who showed so much sublimity of mind as to break her leg."

"Yes, faith," said the marshal, "that is a great idea! But what is the name of the excellent lady who has saved us in this great danger? We have nothing now to fear; have we, duchess?"

"Oh, nothing; she is in her bed, her leg bound up, and unable to move a step."

"But if the lady should find another chaperon?" said the princess; "she is so indefatigable."

"Oh, do not be afraid: it is not so easy to find chaperons."

At this moment the throng of courtiers separated, and the king approached; the group became silent. A moment afterwards his clear and well-known voice was heard: "Adieu, ladies. Good-night, gentlemen."

Every one rose.

The king advanced towards the door, then, turning before leaving the room, he said, "By-the-bye, there will be a presentation to-morrow at Versailles."

These words fell like a thunderbolt on the assembly. The king glanced round the group of ladies, who looked at each other and turned pale; then he left the apartment without adding another word. Scarcely had he crossed the threshold with the long train of gentlemen attending him, when there was a general explosion among the princesses and the ladies around them.

"A presentation!" stammered the Duchess de Grammont, her lips quite livid. "What does his majesty mean?"

"Eh! duchess," said the marshal, with one of those smiles which even his best friends could not pardon; "can this be the presentation you have just been speaking of?"

The princesses bit their lips with vexation.

"Oh, it is impossible," murmured the duchess.

"Ah, duchess," said the marshal, "they do set legs so well nowadays!"

The Duke de Choiseul approached his sister, the Duchess de Grammont, and pressed her arm as a warning not to go too far; but she was too deeply wounded to attend to him.

"It would be an insult to us all," she exclaimed.

"Yes; an insult indeed!" repeated the Princess de Guemenée.

Monsieur de Choiseul saw he could do nothing more, and walked a short distance off.

"Oh, your royal highnesses," cried the duchess, addressing the king's three daughters, "there is no resource for us now but in you! You, the highest ladies in the kingdom, will you endure it? Must we be exposed, in the only asylum remaining for ladies of rank, to meet a person with whom we should not allow our chambermaids to associate?"

The princesses, instead of replying, hung down their heads.

"Oh, your royal highnesses, in heaven's name!" exclaimed she, "save us."

"The king is master in this as in everything else," said the Princess Adelaide, sighing.

"That is true," said the Duke de Richelieu.

"But the entire court of France will be compromised in the affair," cried the duchess. "Gentlemen, have you then no regard for the honour of your families?"

"Ladies," said the Duke de Choiseul, trying to laugh, "as this seems bordering on a conspiracy, you must allow me to retire, and to take with me M. de Sartines. Will you come, marshal?"

"I?—faith, I adore conspiracies!—I shall certainly stay," replied Marshal Richelieu.

The two ministers departed.

There now remained around the princesses eight or ten of the ladies who had espoused most warmly the league against the presentation. Richelieu was the only gentleman. The ladies looked at him suspiciously, as if he had been a Trojan in the Grecian camp.

"I represent my daughter, the Countess d'Egmont," said he; "go on, ladies, go on."

"Your royal highnesses," the Duchess de Grammont began, "there is a means by which we can show our sense of the infamous nature of the proceedings, and for my part I shall make use of the means."

"What is it?" all exclaimed.

"We have been told that the king is master," she continued.

"And I reply it is just and right that he should be," said the marshal.

"He is master in his own palace, but we are mistresses in our own houses. Now, what is to prevent me from giving my coachman directions to drive to Chanteloup to-night, instead of to Versailles?"

"Or what is to prevent others from imitating you?" said the Princess de Guemenée.

"Why should we not all imitate the duchess?" asked the Marchioness de Mirepoix.

"Oh, your royal highnesses," exclaimed the duchess, again addressing the princesses; "what a noble example it would be for you to give the court!"

"The king would be angry with us," said the Princess Sophie.

"No, your royal highness; I am certain he would not. On the contrary, it would make him reflect; and he has such exquisite sense, such perfect tact, that he will afterwards acknowledge you to be in the right, and he will be grateful to you."

"It is true," said the Princess Victoire, encouraged by the general spirit of rebellion; "the king said nothing when we refused to admit the visits of the countess, but on a public occasion like this he might not be disposed to forgive us."

"No, certainly," replied the duchess; "if you were the only ladies who absented yourselves, but when he sees that we have all left the court?"

"All!" exclaimed the party.

"Yes, all," repeated the old marshal.

"Then you are of the plot?" said the Princess Adelaide.

"Certainly, I am, and therefore I wish to speak."

"Speak, marshal, speak!" said Madame de Grammont.

"We must proceed methodically," said he. "It is not enough all to shout in chorus this or that. I have known people say, 'This is what I shall do,' but at the moment of action they have done the very contrary. Now, as I have the honour to make one in this conspiracy, I do not wish

to be left by myself, as I always was when I took part in the conspiracies under the late king and under the regency."

"Upon my word, marshal, you forget yourself. Among the amazons you take upon you the airs of a leader," said the duchess.

"Madame, I beg you to consider that I may have some right to that position. You hate Madame Dubarry—there I have let the name slip out, but nobody heard it!—you hate her more than I; but I am more compromised than you."

"How is that?"

"I have not been at Luciennes for eight days, nor at her apartments at Versailles for four. The affair has gone so far that a footman was sent to ask if I was ill; so I am already looked on with suspicion. However, I am not ambitious—I yield the leadership to you; you have set the affair on foot, you have stirred us all, you revolutionize our consciences—yours must be the baton of command."

"No, I must follow their royal highnesses," said the duchess, respectfully.

"Oh, pray let us remain passive," said the Princess Adelaide; "we are going to Saint Denis to see our sister Louise; she will keep us there, and of course there can be nothing said."

"Nothing, nothing at all, unless by some very ill-disposed person," said the marshal.

"As for me," said the Duchess de Grammont, "I have to go to Chanteloup, because it is hay-making season."

"Bravo!" cried the duke; "an excellent reason."

"I must stay at home: one of my children is ill, and I have to nurse him," said the Princess de Guemenée.

"I," said the Duchess de Polastron, "have felt a giddiness all this evening; I am sure I shall be dangerously ill if Tronchin do not bleed me to-morrow."

"And I," said the Marchioness de Mirepoix, majestically, "I shall not go to Versailles, because I shall not—that is my reason."

"Excellent! excellent!" said the marshal; "all this is quite logical; but we must swear."

"What! we must swear?"

"Yes; conspirators always swear, from the plot of Catiline down to that of Cellamare, in which I had the honour of participating. We always swore; it is true the thing did not succeed at all the better for it, still, let us respect old customs. Let us swear, then—you shall see how solemn it is!"

He extended his hand in the midst of the group of ladies, and said with proper dignity, "I swear."

All the ladies repeated the oath, with the exception of the princesses, who slipped away.

"Now that all is over," said the marshal, "when once people have sworn in conspiracies, they never do anything more."

"Oh, what a fury she will be in," said the Duchess de Grammont, "when she finds herself all alone in the grand saloon!"

"Hum!" said the marshal; "the king will most probably banish us for a little."

"Ah!" cried the Princess de Guemenée, "what kind of court would it be if we were banished? The King of Denmark is expected; who will be presented to him? The dauphiness is expected; to whom will she be presented? Besides, a whole court is never exiled—a selection is made."

"I know that very well, and I fear I run a great risk of being chosen for the distinction of banishment!" said the marshal. "I have always been distinguished in that way. Four times have I been selected for it, at the lowest reckoning—this is my fifth conspiracy, ladies."

"Do not be afraid, marshal," said the Duchess de Grammont; "if any one be marked out for banishment, I shall be the person."

"Or your brother, the Duke de Choiseul—take care, duchess," replied the marshal.

"My brother is of my mind—he could submit to misfortune, not to an insult."

"It will be neither you, marshal, nor you, duchess, who will be banished," said the Marchioness de Mirepoix; "I shall be the victim. The king will never pardon me for being less condescending to the countess than I was to the marchioness."

"That is true," said the marshal; "you were always called the favourite of the favourite. I am sorry for you now—we shall be banished together."

"Let him banish us all," said the Princess de Guemenée, rising; "for I trust none of us will draw back from the resolution which we have taken."

"We cannot draw back after our oath," said the marshal.

"Besides," said the Duchess de Grammont, "I have still other resources."

"You?"

"Yes; she cannot be presented to-morrow evening without three things."

"What three?"

"A hairdresser, a dress, and a carriage."

"Certainly."

"Well, she shall not be at Versailles at ten o'clock—the king will become impatient—he will dismiss the court, and the presentation will be postponed till the Greek Kalends, on account of the arrival of the dauphiness."

A burst of delight followed this new episode in the conspiracy, but while applauding even more loudly than the others, the Duke de Richelieu and the Marchioness de Mirepoix exchanged glances—the same idea had occurred simultaneously to the two old courtiers.

At eleven o'clock all the conspirators, lighted by a lovely moon, were speeding along the roads to Versailles and Saint Germain.

Marshal Richelieu, however, mounted his groom's horse, and whilst his carriage, with the blinds drawn closely down, bore him ostensibly to Versailles, he reached Paris by a cross road.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NO HAIRDRESSER, NO DRESS, NO CARRIAGE.

IT would have been in bad taste for the Countess Dubarry to have gone merely from her apartments in the palace of Versailles to the grand saloon where the presentations took place. Besides, at Versailles there were not the necessary appliances and means for such an important day.

But a better reason than any of these was, that it was not the custom. The highly-favoured being who was to be presented always arrived with

the noise and state of a foreign ambassador, whether it were from her house in the town of Versailles, or in Paris. Madame Dubarry chose to arrive from the latter place.

At eleven o'clock in the morning therefore, she was at her house in the Rue de Valois with the Countess de Bearn, whom she kept under lock and key when she did not keep her under her smiles, and whose burn was attended to most carefully—every secret of medicine and chemistry being exhausted on it.

From the preceding evening Jean, Chon, and Dorée had been at work; and any one who could have seen them at their work, would have formed an exalted idea of the power of gold, or the greatness of human intellect.

The one made sure of the hairdresser, the other harassed the sempstress. Jean took the department of the carriage to himself, but also cast an eye occasionally on the hairdresser and the dressmakers. The countess, occupied with flowers, diamonds, and lace, was buried in boxes, cases, and caskets, and gave audiences every hour to couriers from Versailles, who informed her how matters were going on. Orders had been given for lighting the queen's drawing-room, and no change had taken place in the king's intentions.

About four the viscount came in, pale, agitated, but joyful.

"Well?" asked the countess.

"Well, all will be ready!"

"The hairdresser?"

"I went to him myself; Dorée was with him; but, to make sure of him. I slipped fifty louis-d'ors into his hand. He will dine here at six o'clock precisely, so you may be quite easy on that score."

"My dress?"

"It will be a perfect wonder! Chon is superintending it; there are six-and-twenty workwomen at it, sewing on the pearls, the ribbons, and the trimmings. They go on breadth by breadth at the work, and it would certainly require eight days for any other persons than ourselves to have it finished. It is a prodigious undertaking!"

"But do you say they are doing it breadth by breadth?"

"Yes, my dear—there are thirteen breadths of the stuff; two workwomen at each breadth—one works at the right, the other at the left, putting on the jewels and trimmings; then at the last they will all be joined together. It will take them two hours yet; at six you will have it."

"Are you quite sure, Jean?"

"Yesterday I made a calculation with an engineer about it. There are ten thousand stitches in each breadth; that is, five thousand for each workwoman. In such thick stuff, a woman can only make one stitch in five seconds; that is, twelve in one minute, seven hundred and twenty in one hour, and seven thousand two hundred in ten hours. I leave out two thousand two hundred for needle-threading and slipped stitches, and this leaves four good hours about work."

"And what about the carriage?"

"Oh, I'll answer for it. The varnish is now getting dry in a large store heated to fifty degrees. It is an elegant vis-à-vis, compared with which the carriages sent for the dauphiness are a mere trifle. Besides the coats of arms on the four panels, there is the war-cry of the Dubarries: 'Boutés en avant!' on each side. Besides that, I made them paint on one place two doves billing and cooing, and in another a heart pierced with a dart—the whole surrounded by bows and arrows, quivers and torches. There is such a crowd of people at Francian's to see it! It will be here exactly at eight."

At this moment Chon and Dorée came in and confirmed all that Jean had said.

"Thank you, my brave aides-de-camp!" said the countess.

"My sweet sister," said the viscount, "your eyes look a little dim—had you not better sleep for an hour?—it would quite revive you."

"Sleep!—no! I shall sleep to-night, and that is more than some will do."

Whilst these preparations were going on, the report of the intended presentation had spread through all Paris. Idle and careless as they appear, no people love news more than the Parisians. None knew better all the courtiers and all the intrigues of Versailles than the Parisian cockney of the eighteenth century, though debarred from the festivities of the palace, and seeing only the hieroglyphics on the carriages and the curious liveries of the footmen. At that period such or such a nobleman was known to the whole city. The reason was simple. The court at that period formed the principal attraction in the theatres and in the gardens. Marshal Richelieu in his place at the Italian opera, Madame Dubarry in a coach rivalling that of royalty itself, were constantly before the public, like some favourite comedian or admired actress of the present day.

People are much more interested in faces that are well known to them. Every one in Paris knew Madame Dubarry's face, constantly shown where a rich and pretty woman likes to be seen—in the theatres, in the public walks, in the shops. Besides, she was easily recognised by means of portraits, caricatures, and by her negro page, Zamore. The affair of the presentation, therefore, occupied the city nearly as much as the court. This day there was a crowd near the Palais Royal; but, poor Philosophy! it was not to see Rousseau playing chess at the Café de la Regence: it was to see the favourite in her fine coach and her handsome dress, of which they had heard so much. There was something deep in Jean Dubarry's expression, "We cost a pretty little sum to France!" And it was natural that France, represented by Paris, should wish to enjoy the sight for which they had paid so dearly. Madame Dubarry knew her people well, for they were much more her people than they had been Queen Maria Leczinska's. She knew that they loved to be dazzled by magnificence; and, as she was good-natured, she laboured to make the spectacle correspond to the expense to which she put them.

Instead of sleeping, as her brother advised her, she took a bath about five o'clock. Then, about six o'clock, she began to expect her hairdresser: and, while she waits, we shall explain, if we can, what hairdressing then was.

It was building a complete edifice. This was the commencement of the castles which the ladies of the court of the young king, Louis XVI. erected with towers and bastions on their heads. May we not, even in this frivolity of fashion, discover something presaging that a mine was dug beneath the feet of all who were, or all who pretended to be, great? Or that by some mysterious divination, the women of the aristocracy had learned they should have a short time to enjoy their titles—that they, therefore, made the most of them, bearing them aloft on their heads: and as if—fatal omen!—not having long to keep their heads, they must decorate those heads to the utmost point which extravagance can attain, and raise them as high as possible above the vulgar!

To plait the hair; to elevate it on a silken cushion; to roll it about a hoop of whalebone; to adorn it with diamonds, pearls, and flowers; to sprinkle it with powder, which made the eyes brilliant and the complexion

fresh; to blend into harmony with the complexion pearl, ruby, opal, diamond, flowers of all hues and of all forms—to do all this, a man must be not only a great artist, but the most patient of his race.

As a proof that such a man was esteemed great, the hairdresser was the only tradesman allowed to wear a sword.

This explanation may account for the fifty louis-d'ors given by Jean Dubarry to the hairdresser of the court. It may account, also, for some fears lest the great Lubin (the court hairdresser of that day was called Lubin) might not be so punctual or so skilful on the occasion as was desirable.

The fears about his punctuality were, alas! too well founded. Six o'clock struck, and the hairdresser did not appear; then half-past six came: then a quarter to seven. One thought inspired some hope in the anxious hearts of all; it was, that a man of Monsieur Lubin's importance would naturally make people wait a little. But seven struck. The viscount feared that the dinner prepared for the hairdresser might be cold when he came, and the great artist might be dissatisfied. He sent a servant to say that dinner waited.

The servant returned in a quarter of an hour. Those only who have waited under similar circumstances can tell how many seconds there are in such a quarter of an hour.

The servant had spoken to Madame Lubin herself, who assured him that Monsieur Lubin had set out for the countess's, that if he were not then there, he must be on the way.

"Perhaps," said Jean, "he has been delayed in consequence of not getting a carriage. We will wait a little."

"Besides," said the countess, "there will be no time lost; my hair can be attended to when I am half dressed; the presentation does not take place until ten; we have still three hours, it will only take one to go to Versailles. In the mean time, to employ me, Chon, show me my dress. Where is Chon? Chon! Chon! my dress, my dress!"

"Your dress has not come yet, madame," said Dorée, "and your sister went ten minutes ago to see about it herself."

"Oh," exclaimed the viscount, "I hear a noise of wheels! It is the carriage brought home, no doubt."

The viscount was mistaken; it was Chon, who had come back full speed.

"My dress!" cried the countess, whilst Chon was still in the vestibule; "my dress!"

"Has it not come?" asked Chon, terror-stricken.

"No."

"Oh, well, it can't be long. When I got to the dressmaker's she had just set out in a fiacre with two of her women, bringing the dress to fit it on."

"It is a good way from her house to this, and as you drove very fast no doubt you have passed her," said Jean.

"Yes, yes! certainly!" replied Chon, yet she could not suppress a vague feeling of apprehension.

"Viscount," said the countess, "you had better send about the carriage, that there may be no disappointment on that side at least."

"You are right, Jeanne," and Dubarry opened the door. "Let some of you," cried he, "take the new horses to Francian's for the carriage, so that they may be all ready harnessed when it arrives."

The coachman and the horses set off. As the sound of their trampling died away, Zamore entered with a letter.

"A letter for Mistress Barry," said he.

"Who brought it?"
"A man."
"A man? What sort of man?"
"A man on horseback."
"And why did he give it to you?"
"Because Zamore was at the door."
"But read it! Read it rather than question him!" cried Jean.
"You are right, viscount."
"Ay, provided there be nothing annoying in the letter," he muttered.
"Oh, no! it is some petition for his majesty."
"It is not folded like a petition."
"Really, viscount, you are full of fears," said the countess, smiling, and she broke the seal. At the first line she shrieked, and fell back in her chair half-dead.
"No hairdresser, no dress, no carriage!" she cried. Chon sprang towards her. Jean seized the letter. It was evidently the writing of a woman, and ran thus:

"MADAME,
"Be not too confident. This evening you shall have no hairdresser, no dress, no carriage. I hope this information will reach you in time to be useful to you. As I do not desire your gratitude, I do not give you my name. Guess who I am, and you will have discovered
"A SINCERE FRIEND."

"Oh!" shouted Dubarry, "all is over! Sang bleu! I must kill somebody! By all the devils! I'll run Lubin through the body! It is half-past seven, and he not here! Confound him! Damn him!"
And as Dubarry was not to be presented that evening, he did not care about his hair, but tore it out unmercifully in handfuls.
"But the dress! Good heavens! the dress!" cried Chon; "a hairdresser could easily be found!"
"Oh, I defy you to find one! What sort of wretch would he be? A murderer! A slaughterer! Oh, death and damnation!"
The countess said nothing, but sighs burst from her bosom, which might have softened the Choiseuls themselves could they but have heard them.
"Let us think, let us think!" said Chon, "a little calmness only. Let us find out another hairdresser, and send to the dressmaker to know what has become of the dress!"
"No hairdresser!" murmured the almost fainting countess; "no dress! no carriage!"
"Yes, no carriage!" cried Jean; "it does not come either! It is a plot, countess, it is a plot! Cannot Sartines find out the authors of it? Cannot Maupeou hang them? Can they not with their accomplices be burned in the market-place? I will have the hairdresser broken on the wheel! the dressmaker torn to pieces with pincers! the coachmaker flayed alive!"
At length the countess recovered a little from her state of stupefaction, but it was only to feel more poignantly all the horror of her situation.
"All is lost!" she exclaimed. "Those who have bought over Lubin are rich enough to remove all the good hairdressers from Paris. None are left me but wretches who would destroy my hair!—and my dress!—my poor dress!—and my new carriage! I thought the sight of it would have made them burst with envy!"
Dubarry did not answer—but, rolling his eyes fearfully, strode up and

down the room, striking himself against the angles of the apartment; and as often as he encountered any ornament or small article of furniture, abandoning his hair, he dashed them into the smallest morsels possible, and then stamped on them with his feet.

In the midst of this scene of horror, which, spreading from the boudoir to the ante-rooms, and from the ante-rooms to the court, caused all the domestics to run hither and thither with twenty different and contradictory orders, a young man in a light green coat, a satin waistcoat, lilac breeches, and white silk stockings, got out of a cabriolet, crossed the court, stepping from stone to stone on the tips of his toes, entered the open door abandoned by all the servants, mounted the stairs, and tapped at the countess's dressing-room door.

Jean was just stamping on a tray with a set of Sèvres porcelain, which he had pulled down with the tail of his coat whilst he was dealing a blow with his fist to a great Chinese mandarin. When the noise of these feats had subsided a little, three gentle, discreet, modest taps were heard.

Then followed profound silence; all were in such a state of expectation, that no one could ask who was there.

"Excuse me," said an unknown voice, "but I wish to speak to the Countess Dubarry."

"Sir, people do not enter here in that way!" cried a servant, who had discovered the stranger, and had run after him to prevent his farther advance.

"Never mind! never mind!" cried Jean, flinging open the door with a hand which might have driven in the gates of Gaza. "Worse cannot happen to us now. What do you want with the countess?"

The stranger avoided the shock of this sudden meeting by springing backwards, and falling into the third position.

"Sir," said he, "I came to offer my services to the Countess Dubarry."

"What services, sir?"

"My professional services, sir."

"What is your profession?"

"I am a hairdresser!" and the stranger bowed a second time.

"Oh," cried Jean, falling on his neck, "a hairdresser! Come in! come in!"

"Come in! Come in, my dear sir!" cried Chon, almost taking the astonished young man in her arms.

"A hairdresser?" cried Madame Dubarry, raising her hands to heaven. "A hairdresser? An angel! Were you sent by Monsieur Lubin, sir?"

"I was not sent by any one. I read in the gazette that the Countess Dubarry was to be presented this evening: then, said I to myself, suppose that the Countess Dubarry had no hairdresser?—it is not probable, but it is possible—so I think I shall try."

"What is your name, sir?" asked the countess, a little cooled by this account.

"Leonard, madame."

"Leonard? You are not known to any one?"

"If you accept my services, madame, to-morrow every one will know me."

"Hum!" said Jean, "there are two kinds of hairdressing."

"If madame distrusts my skill, I shall retire."

"We have no time to try you," said Chon.

"Why make any trial?" cried the young man, walking round the countess in a fit of enthusiasm. "I know, madame, that all eyes must be

drawn to you by the style of your hair, and already in contemplating you I have invented a head which will have a most powerful effect."

And the young man made a gesture with his hand, so full of confidence in himself, that the countess's resolution was a little shaken, and hope sprang up in the hearts of Chon and Jean.

"Have you, really?" said she, quite astonished at the young man's ease—for he was now leaning back, hand on hip, as the great Lubin himself would have done.

"Yes—but, madame, I must see your dress, that I may make the ornaments harmonise with it."

"Oh, my dress! my dress!" cried the countess, recalled by his words to the terrible reality.

Jean struck his forehead fiercely. "Oh, imagine, sir," cried he—"imagine what a horrid trick! They have carried off dress—dressmaker—all! Chon, Chon, dear Chon!" and Dubarry, tired of tearing out his hair, gave way to a downright fit of sobbing.

"Suppose you were to go back to the dressmaker's, Chon," said the countess.

"For what purpose? You know she had set out to come hither."

"Alas! alas!" murmured the countess, falling back in her chair, "of what use is a hairdresser when I have no dress?"

At this moment the door-bell rung: all the doors had been carefully shut, and even bolted, by the porter, lest any other should slip in as the hairdresser had done.

"Some one rings," said the countess.

Chon sprang to a window.

"A bandbox!" cried she.

"A bandbox!" cried the countess.

"Coming in?" cried Jean.

"Yes—no—yes. It is given to the porter—run, Jean, run!"

He dashed down the stairs, got before all the footmen, and snatched the bandbox from the porter.

Chon looked through the window.

He pulled off the lid, plunged his hand into the depths of the bandbox, and uttered a yell of joy. It contained a beautiful dress of Chinese satin, with flowers put on, and a complete trimming of lace of immense value.

"A dress! A dress!" shouted Chon, clapping her hands.

"A dress?" repeated the countess, almost sinking under her joy, as she had before under her grief.

"Who gave it you, rogue?" asked the viscount of the porter.

"A woman, sir, whom I don't know."

"Where is she?"

"Sir, she laid it on the step of the door, cried 'For the countess,' and disappeared."

"Well, we have got a dress—that is the main thing!"

"Come up, Jean, come up!" called Chon, "my sister is dying with impatience."

"Look!" said Jean, returning to the room, "look!—admire! See what fate sends you!"

"But it will not go on—it will not fit—it was not made for me. Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! what a misfortune, for it is beautiful!"

Chon quickly measured it.

"The same length, the same width in the waist!" she exclaimed.

"What admirable stuff!" said Jean.

"It is miraculous!" said Chon.

"It is terrible!" said the countess.

"Not at all," replied the viscount, "for it proves, that although you have great enemies, you have also devoted friends."

"It cannot be sent by a friend," said Chon, "for how should a friend know of the plot formed against us? It must be sent by a sylph."

"Let it be sent by his Satanic Majesty!" exclaimed the countess, "I care not, provided it assists me to oppose the Choiseuls! Whoever sent it, he cannot be so much of a demon as they."

"And now," said Jean, "I am sure that you may confidently submit your head to this gentleman."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because he has been sent by the same person who sent the dress."

"I?" said Leonard, with the most innocent surprise.

"Come, come, my dear sir! acknowledge that it was all a tale about the gazette!"

"The simple truth, sir. Here is the paper—I kept it for curl-papers," and he drew out the gazette in which the presentation was announced.

"Now," said Chon, "let him set to work—it is eight o'clock."

"Oh, we have time enough!" said the hairdresser, "it will only take an hour to go to Versailles."

"Yes, if we have a carriage," said the countess.

"Oh, mordieu! that is true!" exclaimed Jean. "That wretch, Francian, does not come."

"You know we have been warned; no hairdresser, no dress, no carriage!" repeated the countess.

"Now, if the coachmaker should not keep his word?" said Chon.

"No; here he is, here he is!" cried Jean.

"And the carriage, the carriage?" exclaimed the countess.

"It is at the door, no doubt. But what is the matter with the coachmaker?"

At that moment Francian rushed in, all in alarm.

"Oh, viscount!" cried he, "the carriage was on its way hither, when at the corner of a street it was seized by four men; they knocked down my young man, who was bringing it, seized the reins, and set off with it at a gallop."

"I told you so!—I told you so!" said Dubarry, sitting down resignedly in his chair.

"But, brother," exclaimed Chon, "exert yourself!—do something!"

"What for?"

"To get a carriage! the horses here are done out, and the carriages dirty. Jeanne cannot go in any of them."

"Bah! the little birds find food when they don't expect it, and we got a hairdresser and a dress in our need. Yes, our unknown friend will not forget a carriage!"

"Hush!" cried Chon, "surely I heard carriage wheels."

"Yes, it is stopping," he replied.

Then, springing to a window which he opened, he shouted to the servants, "Run, rascals, run! Quick, quick! Find out our benefactor!"

A carriage, lined with white satin, and drawn by two splendid bay horses, stood before the door. But neither coachman nor footman was to be seen; a common street porter held the horses by the head. A crown had been given to him by a person unknown to him at the end of the street, with orders to lead the carriage to the countess's door.

They looked at the panels; the arms were replaced by a simple rose.

The whole of this counterplay against the miseries with which the evening had commenced lasted about an hour.

Jean had the carriage taken into the yard, and the gates locked on it: he carried up the key with him. On returning to the dressing-room, he found the hairdresser about to give the countess the first proof of his profound knowledge of his art.

"Sir," cried the viscount, seizing him by the arm, "if you do not declare who is our protecting genius, that we may make known our eternal gratitude to him, I swear——"

"Allow me," said the young man, interrupting him very phlegmatically, "allow me to say, sir, that you are doing me the honour of squeezing my arm so tight, that I fear my hand will be quite stiff when I shall have to dress the countess's hair, and it is now eight o'clock."

"Leave him alone, Jean, leave him alone!" cried the countess.

Jean sank down in his chair.

"A miracle!" exclaimed Chon; "it is a perfect fit—only an inch too long in front; but ten minutes will alter that!"

"And what is the carriage like?" asked the countess.

"It is in the best style," replied Jean; "I got into it: it is lined with white satin, and perfumed with essence of roses."

"All is right—all is right!" cried the countess, clapping her little hands with delight. "Now, Monsieur Leonard, if you succeed on this occasion, your fortune is made!"

Leonard took possession of her head, and the very first touch of the comb revealed a skilful hand. Rapidity, taste, marvellous precision, a complete knowledge of the relation between the moral and the physical—all these he displayed in the accomplishment of his important duty.

When he had, at the end of three-quarters of an hour, given the finishing touch to the splendid edifice which he had reared on the countess's head, he would have modestly retired, after having washed his hands in a basin which Chon presented to him, as if he had been a king.

"Now, sir," said Dubarry, "you must know that I am as ardent in my loves as in my hatreds—as you have gained my esteem, pray tell me who you are."

"You know already, sir, who I am—my name is Leonard—I am only a beginner."

"A beginner?—Sang bleu! you are a thorough master of your profession!"

"You shall be my hairdresser, Monsieur Leonard," said the countess, looking at herself in a little glass which she had in her hand; "and I shall pay you on each occasion like this fifty louis-d'ors. Chon, count out one hundred for this time—he shall have fifty of earnest money."

"I told you, madame, that you would make my reputation."

"But you must dress no one's hair but mine."

"Keep your hundred louis-d'ors, then, madame—I prefer my liberty—to it I owe the honour of having this evening dressed your hair. Liberty is the first of human blessings."

"A philosophical hairdresser!" exclaimed Dubarry, raising his hands to heaven; "to what shall we come at last? Well, my dear Monsieur Leonard, I shall not quarrel with you—take your hundred louis-d'ors and keep your secret and your liberty. Now, countess, to your carriage!"

The last words were addressed to the Countess de Bearn, who entered

stiff and stately, and dressed like an image in a shrine. She was brought out of her room just when she was to be made use of.

"Now," cried Jean to the servants, "let four of you take her, and carry her downstairs, and if you hurt her, so as to make her heave one sigh, I'll flay you alive!"

Whilst he was superintending this delicate and important operation, assisted by Chon, the countess turned to seek for Monsieur Leonard; he had disappeared.

"But how did he go?" murmured Madame Dubarry, who had not yet quite recovered from the influence of the many surprises of the evening.

"How did he go? Why, through the floor, or up through the ceiling, of course, as all genii do. Take care, countess, that your head-dress does not turn into a heap of mud, your dress into a spider's web, and your coach into a pumpkin, drawn by two rats!"

Having giving utterance to this last fear, Jean took his place beside the Countess de Bearn, and her fortunate god-daughter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE PRESENTATION.

VERSAILLES, like everything really great, is and will long be a fair and lovely scene. Though moss should cover its mouldering walls—though its gods of marble, bronze and lead should lie shattered around their broken fountains—though its broad alleys of clipped trees should remain in all the wild luxuriance of nature—though it should become but a heap of ruins—it will always present to the thinker and the poet a great and touching spectacle. Let such look from its circle of ephemeral splendour to the eternal horizon beyond, and it will be long ere thought and fancy sink to rest again!

But it was, above all, in its days of pomp and splendour that Versailles was fairest to look upon; when its gay and thoughtless population, restrained by a crowd of soldiers still more gay than themselves, thronged its gilded gates—when carriages lined with velvet and satin, blazoned with armorial bearings, thundered over its pavements at the full speed of their prancing steeds—when every window, blazing with light like those of an enchanted palace, exposed to view the moving throng, radiant with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and bending to the gesture of one man, as bends before the wind a field of golden corn, with its bright flowers of crimson, white and blue; yes, Versailles was brilliant indeed, when its gates sent forth couriers to all the powers of the earth—when kings, princes, nobles, generals, learned men, from all parts of the civilized world, trod its rich carpets and its inlaid floors!

But when, for some great ceremony, all its sumptuous furniture was displayed, and its sumptuousness doubled by the magic of a thousand lights, even the coldest imagination must have glowed on beholding what human invention and human power could do. Such was the ceremony observed on the reception of an ambassador, or the presentation of the nobles attending the court.

Louis XIV., the creator of etiquette, a system which shut up each individual within bounds beyond which he could not pass, desired that the favoured few initiated into the magnificence of his regal life should be

struck with such veneration that ever afterwards they could only regard the palace as a temple, and the king as its presiding deity, to whose presence some had the right of approaching nearer than others.

Versailles, then, still magnificent, although already showing symptoms of degeneration, had opened all its doors, lighted all its chandeliers, and exhibited all its splendour for the presentation of Madame Dubarry. The people, inquisitive, though hungry and wretched, forgetting, strange anomaly, both their hunger and wretchedness, that they might gaze on so much grandeur, filled the Place d'Armes and the avenues leading to the palace. Every window of the château poured out floods of light, and the lustres from a distance looked like stars gleaming in an atmosphere of golden dust.

The king left his private apartments exactly at ten. He was dressed rather more richly than usual; that is, his lace was finer, and the buckles alone of his garters and his shoes were worth a million.

The Count de Sartines had informed him of the conspiracy entered into by the ladies the evening before, so that there was a shade of anxiety on his brow, and he trembled lest he should see only gentlemen in the grand saloon. But he was soon reassured, when on entering the saloon set apart for presentations, he saw, amid a cloud of lace and powder mingled with the blaze of diamonds, first, his three daughters, then the Marchioness de Mirepoix, who had talked so loudly among the plotters—in short, all the turbulent spirits who had sworn not to come were there.

Marshal Richelieu, like a general on the eve of an engagement, hurried from one to another, saying to this one, "Ah, I have caught you, perfidious one!" whispering to another, "I was certain you would not keep your oath!" and to a third, "Remember what I told you about conspiracies!"

"But, marshal," replied the ladies, "you are here yourself!"

"Oh, I represent my daughter! I represent the Countess d'Egmont. Look around, you will not find Septimanie! She alone has kept faith with the Duchess de Grammont and the Princess de Guemenée, so I am pretty certain what my fate will be. To-morrow I shall enter on my fifth banishment, or my fourth trip to the Bastille. Most certainly I shall never again conspire."

The king entered. There was a profound silence, during which ten o'clock struck—the hour fixed for the ceremony. His majesty was surrounded by a numerous court, and was attended by about fifty gentlemen, who, not having sworn to come to the presentation, were, probably, for that reason present.

The king observed, at the first glance, that the Duchess de Grammont, the Princess de Guemenée, and the Countess d'Egmont were wanting in this splendid assembly.

He approached the Duke de Choiseul, who affected great calmness, but in spite of all his efforts was somewhat disturbed.

"I do not see the Duchess de Grammont here," said the king.

"Sire, my sister is ill," replied the Duke de Choiseul, "and desired me to present her very humble respects to your majesty."

"So much the worse!" said the king, and he turned his back on the duke. In doing so, he found himself face to face with the Prince de Guemenée.

"And the Princess de Guemenée," said he, "where is she? have you not brought her, prince?"

"It was impossible, sire; when I called at her hotel in order to accompany her here, I found her in bed."

"Oh! so much the worse! so much the worse!" said the king. "Ah, here is the marshal! Good-evening, marshal."

The old courtier bowed with all the suppleness of a youth.

"*You* are not ill, at least!" said the king, loud enough for De Choiseul and De Guemenée to hear him.

"Whenever, sire, I have in prospect the happiness of seeing your majesty, I am perfectly well," replied Richelieu.

"But," said the king, looking round, "I do not see your daughter, the Countess d'Egmont; how comes it that she is not here?"

The duke's features assumed an expression of deep regret.

"Alas! sire, my poor daughter is really not able to lay her humble homage at your majesty's feet—this evening, above all others—ill, sire, ill!"

"So much the worse!" said the king. "Ill! The Countess d'Egmont, who enjoys the finest health in France? So much the worse! so much the worse!" And the king left the marshal as he had left M. de Choiseul and M. de Guemenée.

Then he completed the circuit of the saloon, and particularly complimented the Marchioness de Mirepoix, who did not feel altogether at her ease.

"You see what the price of treachery is," whispered the marshal in her ear; "to-morrow you will be loaded with honours, whilst we—I shudder to think of it!" and he sighed.

"But I think you have rather betrayed the Choiseuls yourself, since you are here, and yet you swore——"

"For my daughter, for my poor Septimanie, marchioness; she will be disgraced for being too faithful!"

"To her father," replied the marchioness.

The marshal pretended not to hear this remark, which might have passed for an epigram.

"Do you not think," said he, "that the king is uneasy?"

"I think he has reason to be so; it is a quarter past ten."

"True; and the countess not here! Shall I tell you what I think?"

"Yes."

"I have some fears."

"Fears about what?"

"Fears that something disagreeable may have happened to that poor countess. You know whether I am right or not, marchioness."

"I! how should I know?"

"Yes; you were up to the neck in the conspiracy."

"Well, I may tell you in confidence, marshal, that I cannot help sharing your fears."

"Oh! our friend the duchess is a fierce antagonist; she has fled, and like the Parthians, she wounds in fleeing. See how restless the Duke de Choiseul is, although he wishes to appear calm; he cannot stay a moment in one position, and he keeps his eye always on the king. Come! confess that there is some plot in the wind."

"I know nothing of it, duke; but, like you, I have suspicions."

"But what can they gain by their plot?"

"Time, my dear marshal, and you know the proverb, 'He who gains time, gains all.' To-morrow something may occur to put off the presentation *sine die*. The dauphiness may reach Compiègne to-morrow instead of four days hence; perhaps they only wished to gain to-morrow."

"Do you know, marchioness, this little tale of yours has all the appearance of truth. There is no sign of her coming."

"And see, the king is becoming impatient!"

"That is the third time he has approached the window; he is really annoyed."

"Things will be much worse presently."

"How so?"

"It is twenty minutes past ten, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Then I may now tell you——"

"What?"

The marchioness looked around, then whispered, "She will not come."

"Oh, heavens! but, marchioness, it will be a scandalous affair."

"It will perhaps cause a lawsuit—a criminal suit. I know from good authority that there will be in the case robbery, abduction, treason. The Choiseuls have played a bold game."

"Very imprudent in them."

"Passion rendered them blind."

"You see what an advantage we have over them, in not being governed by our passions; we are cool, and can look at things calmly."

"Observe, the king is going again to the window."

Gloomy, anxious, and irritated, Louis had drawn near a window, leaned his head on a carved frame, and pressed his forehead to the cool glass.

During this time the conversation of the courtiers sounded like the rustling of the leaves of a forest before a tempest. All eyes wandered from the king to the timepiece, and from the timepiece to the king. The half-hour struck, the clear vibrating sound died away in the vast saloon.

Monsieur de Maupeou approached the king.

"Delightful weather, sire," said he, timidly.

"Very fine, very fine! Do you understand anything of this matter, Monsieur de Maupeou?"

"Of what, sire?"

"About this delay—the poor countess."

"She must be ill, sire," replied the chancellor.

"I can comprehend that the Duchess de Grammont may be ill, that the Princess de Guemenée may be ill, that the Countess d'Egmont may be ill, but not that she should be ill."

"Sire, very great emotion often causes illness, and the countess's joy was so great."

"Ah! there is no longer any hope," said Louis, shaking his head; "she will not come now."

Although the king had uttered these words in a low voice, there was so profound a silence in the saloon that every one heard them. No one, however, had time to reply, even in thought, for just then the noise of a carriage was heard in the court of the palace. All heads moved; eyes interrogated eyes.

The king came forward to the middle of the saloon, that through the open doors he might see the whole length of the gallery.

"I am afraid," whispered the marchioness to the marshal, with a meaning smile, "that some bad news is coming."

But suddenly the king's face brightened, and his eyes flashed with pleasure.

"The Countess Dubarry! the Countess de Beam!" cried the usher to the grand master of the ceremonies.

These two names made all hearts beat, many with very opposite

emotions. A crowd of courtiers, impelled by ungovernable curiosity, drew near the king.

The Marchioness de Mirepoix was nearest him; clasping her hands, she exclaimed, as if ready to fall down and worship, "Oh, how beautiful she is! how beautiful she is!"

The king turned a gracious smile on her.

"She is not a woman," said Richelieu; "she is a fairy."

The king sent the remainder of the smile in the direction of the old courtier.

In fact, the countess never had appeared more lovely; never had such a perfect representation of gentle agitation and modesty, never had a more charming figure or more noble carriage, graced the queen's saloon at Versailles, which, nevertheless, as we have said, was the saloon of presentations.

Lovely in the extreme, dressed with the most perfect taste, and above all, her hair dressed exquisitely, the countess advanced, conducted by Madame de Bearn, who, notwithstanding her suffering, did not betray it by the slightest gesture; yet every movement caused each fibre of her frame to quiver, whilst from her dry and fevered cheeks the rouge dropped off atom by atom.

Every eye was fixed upon the pair who presented such a strange contrast. The old lady, her neck uncovered as in the time of her youth, her head-dress standing up a foot above her head, and her large eyes glittering in their deep sockets, like those of an osprey, seemed, in her splendid dress and with her skeleton appearance, the type of the past leading forward the present.

So striking was the contrast, that it seemed to the king as if his favourite had never looked so beautiful as now, when receiving her from the hand of the old Countess de Bearn.

Just as the countess, according to the etiquette, sank on her knee to kiss the king's hand, Louis seized her arm, raised her up, and in a few words rewarded her for all she had suffered during the last fortnight.

"You at my feet, countess!" said he. "It is I who should be, and who always wish to be, at yours."

Then he extended his arms to her, following the usual ceremonial, but on this occasion the embrace was not a pretended but a real one.

"You have a lovely god-daughter, madame," said the king to the Countess de Bearn; "but she has as noble a chaperon, and one whom I rejoice to see again in my court."

The old lady bowed.

"Go and pay your respects to my daughters," whispered the king to Madame Dubarry, "and show them that you know how to make a curtsey. I hope you will have cause to be satisfied with their reception of you."

The two ladies advanced in the space which was formed around them, whilst the eager looks of all followed every movement which they made.

The king's three daughters, seeing them approach, rose as if moved by springs, and remained standing. Their father fixed a look on them which commanded them to be polite.

The princesses, a little agitated, returned Madame Dubarry's curtsey, which she made much lower than etiquette demanded, and this they thought such good taste that they embraced her as the king had done, and delighted him by their cordiality.

From that moment the countess's success became a triumph, and the

slower and less adroit courtiers had to wait an hour before they could get their bow made to the queen of the night.

She, free from coldness or any feelings of recrimination, received all advances favourably, and seemed to forget all the treachery used against her. Nor was this mere pretence; for her heart was too full of joy to be anything but magnanimous, or to have room for a single unamiable feeling.

Marshal Richelieu showed a knowledge of tactics worthy of the victor of Mahon. Whilst vulgar courtiers waited in their places the result of the presentation, in order to decide whether they should offer incense to the idol or turn their backs on her, he took up a position behind the countess's chair, like a fugleman who serves as a guide by which to deploy a troop of cavalry on a given point. The result was that at last he found himself close to Madame Dubarry, without being troubled by the crowd. The Marchioness de Mirepoix knew that her old friend had been successful in war; she therefore imitated his tactics, and gradually drew her seat near that of the favourite.

Conversation now commenced among the different groups. The countess was criticised from head to foot. She, supported by the love of the king, by the gracious reception of the princesses, and by the high rank of the lady who had presented her, looked round less timidly on the men, and sought out her enemies among the women.

An opaque body obscured her view.

"Ah! Marshal Richelieu," said she, "I was obliged to come here in order to meet you."

"How so, madame?"

"Is it not eight days since I have seen you, either at Versailles, or in Paris, or at Luciennes?"

"I wished to render the pleasure greater of seeing you here this evening," replied the old courtier.

"You guessed that I should be here?"

"I was certain of it."

"Oh, marshal, you knew it, and you did not tell your poor friend who knew nothing about it."

"What! madame, you did not know that you were to be here?"

"No; I was like Æsop when a magistrate arrested him in the street: 'Where are you going?' said he. 'I don't know,' replied the fabulist. 'Then you shall go to prison,' the other replied. 'You see plainly,' said Æsop, 'that I did not know where I was going.' In like manner, duke, I had some idea that I should go to Versailles, but I was not sure. That is why you would have done me a great service had you come and told me that I should be here. But you will come to see me now—will you not?"

"Madame," replied Richelieu, without being moved by her raillery, "I really do not understand how it was that you were not sure of being here."

"I shall tell you; it was because snares were laid on all sides for me," and she looked steadily at him; but he bore her look without wincing.

"Snares! Good heavens! How could that be?"

"First, they stole my hairdresser."

"Stole your hairdresser!"

"Yes."

"But why did you not inform me? I could have sent you—(but let us speak low, if you please)—I could have sent you a treasure; my daughter,

Madame d'Egmont, found him out. He is quite a superior artist to all others, even the royal hairdressers—my little Leonard."

"Leonard?" cried Madame Dubarry.

"Yes, a young man whom she hides from every one. But you have no reason to complain, countess; your hair is charmingly dressed; and, singularly enough, the design is exactly like the sketch which the Countess d'Egmont ordered from Boucher for her own head-dress, and which she intended to have used this evening had she not been ill. Poor Septimanie!"

The countess started, and again fixed a searching look upon the marshal; but he continued, smiling and impenetrable.

"But pardon me, countess, for interrupting you," said he; "you were speaking of snares."

"Yes, after having carried off my hairdresser, they stole my dress—a most beautiful dress."

"How shocking! However, it was not of much consequence, as you had another dress so wonderfully beautiful as that you wear. It is Chinese silk, with flowers embroidered on it. Well, if you had applied to me in your trouble, as you must always do for the future, I could have sent you a dress, which my daughter had ordered, so like that, that I could swear it was the same."

Madame Dubarry seized both the duke's hands, for she now began to suspect who was the enchanter who had befriended her in her difficulties.

"Do you know in whose carriage I came, marshal?" said she.

"In your own, no doubt."

"No; they stole my carriage as well as my hairdresser."

"Why, it was a regular ambuscade!"

"In whose carriage, then, did you come?"

"Will you tell me first what the Countess d'Egmont's carriage is like?"

"I think that for this evening she had ordered one lined with white satin; but there was not time to paint the coat of arms."

"Yes," exclaimed the countess, "and they substituted a rose instead! Marshal, marshal, you are an adorable man!" and she held out to him both her hands, which he covered with kisses. All at once he felt her start.

"What is the matter, countess?" inquired he, looking round.

"Marshal," said the countess, with an alarmed air, "who is that man near the Prince de Guemenée?"

"In a Prussian uniform?"

"Yes—the dark man with black eyes, and such an expressive countenance."

"He is some officer of rank, countess, whom his Prussian majesty has sent, no doubt, to do honour to your presentation."

"Do not jest, marshal; I know that man. He was in France three or four years ago; I have sought him everywhere, but could never discover him."

"I think you must be mistaken, countess. He is the Count de Fenix, a foreigner, and only arrived in France yesterday or the day before."

"Observe how he looks at me."

"Every one looks at you, you are so beautiful."

"He bows to me!—he bows to me!—do you see him?"

"Every one bows to you—at least, all who have not already done so."

But the countess, who seemed greatly agitated, paid no attention to the

duke's gallant speeches, but kept her eyes riveted on the stranger who had attracted her attention. Then rising, as if involuntarily, she advanced a few steps towards the unknown.

The king, who kept his eye fixed on her, observed this movement, and thought that she desired to be near him ; and as etiquette had been sufficiently attended to in keeping so long from her side, he approached to congratulate her on her success. Her thoughts were, however, too much engaged to be turned from their object.

"Sire," said she, "who is that Prussian officer with his back to the Prince de Guemenée ?"

"And who is looking at us at this moment ?" asked the king.

"Yes."

"That strongly marked face, that square head, framed as it were in the gold collar ?"

"Yes—yes—the same."

"He is an accredited agent of my cousin of Prussia—some philosopher like himself, I think. I desired him to be here this evening, as I wished Prussian philosophy to enhance, by its ambassador, the triumph of Cotillon III."

"But what is his name, sire ?"

"Let me think—ah !—yes—the Count de Fenix."

"It is the same," murmured she to herself ; "yes, I am sure it is he."

The king waited a few moments, in order to give Madame Dubarry time to ask further questions if she wished to do so ; but finding that she did not speak, he said in a loud voice, "Ladies, her royal highness the dauphiness will arrive to-morrow at Compiègne ; we shall meet her precisely at noon. All the ladies who have been *presented* will go, except, however, those who are ill, for the journey might be fatiguing, and her royal highness would be sorry to aggravate their indisposition."

As the king pronounced these words, he looked sternly at the Duke de Choiseul, the Prince de Guemenée, and the Marshal de Richelieu.

There was a profound silence ; every one understood the meaning of the royal words—they carried disgrace in their front.

"Sire," said Madame Dubarry, who had remained near the king, "may I request your gracious pardon for the Countess d'Egmont ?"

"Why so, may I ask !"

"Because she is the daughter of Marshal Richelieu, who is my most faithful friend."

"Richelieu ?"

"I am certain he is, sire."

"I shall do what you wish, countess," said the king.

The king then approached the marshal, who had watched every movement of the countess's lips, and, if he had not heard her words, had at least guessed their meaning.

"I hope, my dear marshal," said he, "that the Countess d'Egmont will be better to-morrow ?"

"Certainly, sire ; if your majesty desire it, she will even come out this evening."

And Richelieu made a bow which expressed at once respect and gratitude.

The king then whispered a word in the countess's ear.

"Sire," replied she, with a curtsey accompanied by a charming smile, "I am your majesty's obedient servant."

The king, by a wave of his hand, saluted all the assembly and retired.

Scarcely had he crossed the threshold when the countess's eyes turned again on the singular man who had before attracted her so strongly.

This man bowed like the rest as the king passed along, but even as he bowed there was something haughty, almost threatening, in the expression of his countenance. When Louis XV. had disappeared, he made way for himself through the different groups, and stopped within two paces of Madame Dubarry. The countess, attracted by an inexpressible curiosity, made one step forward, so that, as the unknown bowed to her, he could say in a low voice and so as not to be overheard, "Do you know me again, madame?"

"Yes, sir; you are the prophet whom I met in the Place Louis XV."

The stranger fixed his clear and penetrating glance on her.

"Well, did I speak falsely, madame, when I predicted you should be queen of France?"

"No, sir; your prediction is accomplished, or at least nearly so, and I am ready to fulfil my part of the engagement. Speak, sir, what do you desire?"

"This place is ill chosen for such a purpose; besides, the moment for me to make my request is not yet come."

"Whenever it does come, you will find me ready to grant it."

"May I, at any time, in any place, at any hour, have liberty to be admitted to your presence?"

"I promise it."

"Thanks."

"But under what name shall I expect you? Under that of the Count de Fenix?"

"No, under that of Joseph Balsamo."

"Joseph Balsamo," repeated the countess to herself, whilst the mysterious stranger disappeared among the groups of courtiers—"Joseph Balsamo!—I shall not forget it!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

COMPIEGNE.

THE following morning Compiègne awoke transported, intoxicated with joy; or rather, to be more exact, Compiègne never went to rest.

The evening before, the first detachment of the king's guards had entered the town, and whilst the officers took up their position, the magistrates, assisted by the lord high steward and other functionaries, prepared the town for the distinguished honour which was to be conferred on it. Triumphal arches composed of evergreens, roses, and lilacs; inscriptions in Latin, French, and German; compositions in verse and prose, occupied all the sub-magistracy of Picardy from night till morn.

Young girls dressed in white, according to immemorial usage; municipal officers clad in black; monks attired in grey; the clergy in their richest vestures; officers and soldiers in their new uniforms,—all were at their posts, ready to advance on the first signal of the arrival of the dauphiness.

The dauphin had arrived incognito with his two brothers about eleven o'clock the night before. Very early in the morning he mounted his horse, as if he had been a private gentleman, and, followed by his brothers, the

Count de Provence and the Count d'Artois, the one fifteen and the other thirteen years of age, he galloped off in the direction of Ribecourt, the road by which the princess was to approach. It was not to the young prince, we must confess, that this gallant idea had first occurred; it was suggested by his tutor, Monsieur de Lavanguyon, who had been desired by the king to instruct his august pupil in all the duties which the next twenty-four hours would impose upon him. The tutor, therefore, had thought it right, in order to maintain the honour of the monarchy, to cause him to follow the traditional example of the kings of his race—Henry IV., Louis XIII., Louis XIV., and Louis XV.—who desired to see their future wives without any of the illusions of dress and ornament, and therefore met them when not expected on the road.

Mounted on swift horses, the three brothers accomplished three or four leagues in half an hour; the eldest had set out serious, the two others laughing. At half-past eight they returned: the dauphin still serious, the Count de Provence almost ill-tempered, the Count d'Artois more gay than before. The dauphin was uneasy, the Count de Provence envious, and the Count d'Artois enchanted, about one and the same thing—the beauty of the dauphiness. The grave, jealous, and careless character of each prince respectively was written on his face.

At ten o'clock the look-out employed to watch for the expected train announced that a white flag was displayed on the steeple of the church of Cfeves, which was to be the signal that the dauphiness was approaching. The bells of the church commenced to ring, and were answered by the firing of cannon.

At that instant, as if he had only waited for this signal, the king entered Compiègne in a carriage drawn by eight horses, between a double file of his body-guards, and followed by the immense train of the carriages of the court. The guards and dragoons, at a gallop, opened a passage through the crowd, which was divided between two feelings, desire to see the king and curiosity with regard to the dauphiness. One hundred carriages drawn by four horses, extending nearly a league in length, contained four hundred ladies, and as many lords, of the noblest families of France. These hundred carriages were escorted by outriders, heyducks, footmen, and pages. The gentlemen of the king's household were on horseback, and formed a brilliant army, glittering like a sea of velvet and gold, waving plumes, and silk, in the midst of the dust raised by the horses' feet.

They halted an instant at Compiègne, then slowly proceeded to the spot agreed on for the meeting, and marked by a cross near the village of Magny. All the young nobility thronged around the dauphin, and all the old around the king.

On the other side the dauphiness was also slowly approaching the appointed place.

At length the two parties met. On both sides the courtiers left their carriages; two only remained occupied—that of the king and that of the dauphiness. The door of the dauphiness's carriage was open, and the young archduchess sprang lightly to the ground, and advanced to the royal carriage. The king, on perceiving his daughter-in-law, ordered the door to be opened, and hurriedly got out.

The dauphiness had calculated her time so well, that just as the king put his foot to the ground she was close to him, and she sank on her knee. He raised the young princess, and embraced her tenderly, yet casting a look upon her which made her blush.

"His royal highness the dauphin," said the king, introducing his grandson, who had kept behind the dauphiness without being perceived by her, at least ostensibly.

The dauphiness made him a graceful curtsey; he bowed, blushing in his turn.

Then after the dauphin came his two brothers, then the three princesses; the dauphiness had something gracious to say to each.

Whilst these introductions were going on, Madame Dubarry stood anxiously behind the princesses. Would she be thought of?—would she be forgotten?

After the introduction of the Princess Sophie, the last of the king's daughters, there was a pause; every breath was suspended. The king seemed to hesitate; the dauphiness seemed to expect some incident concerning which she had been previously informed.

The king looked round, and seeing the countess within reach, took her hand; all near him stepped back, and he found himself in the midst of a circle with the dauphiness.

"The Countess Dubarry," said he, "my very dear friend."

The dauphiness turned pale, yet a gracious smile appeared on her white lips. "Your majesty is happy," said she, "in possessing so charming a friend; and I am not surprised at the attachment which she inspires."

Every one heard these words with astonishment amounting to stupefaction. It was evident that the dauphiness followed the instructions of the court of Austria; perhaps the very words she repeated were dictated by Maria Theresa.

The Duke de Choiseul then thought that his presence was necessary. He advanced to be presented in his turn; but the king made a sign with his head, the trumpets sounded, the drums beat, the cannon were fired. His majesty took the young princess's hand, to conduct her to her carriage. She passed close to the Duke de Choiseul. Did she see him or did she not? It was impossible to say; but it is certain that she made no sign of recognition. At the moment when she entered her carriage, the bells of the town pealed out, and their clear tones were heard above all the other festive sounds.

The countess returned to her carriage, all radiant with delight and pride.

There was a halt for about ten minutes whilst the king was re-entering his carriage and giving his orders to return to Compiègne. During this time, conversation, which had been suspended from respect or by the interest of the scene, again became general. Dubarry drew near his sister's carriage—she received him with smiles, expecting his congratulations.

"Jeanne," said he, pointing to a gentleman on horseback, who was talking at the door of a carriage in the train of the dauphiness; "do you know that young man?"

"No," replied the countess; "but do you know what the dauphiness said when the king presented me to her?"

"I am not thinking of that. That young man is the Chevalier Philip de Taverney."

"He who wounded you?"

"Yes; and do you know who that beautiful creature is with whom he is talking?"

"The young girl so pale and so majestic?"

"Yes, she at whom the king is looking at this moment—I think he is asking the dauphiness her name."

"Well, what then?"

"That young girl is Taverney's sister."

"Ah!" exclaimed the countess.

"Jeanne, I don't know why, but I think you have as much reason to fear the sister as I the brother."

"You are a fool!"

"No, I am tolerably wise; and I shall, at all events, look after the youth."

"Well, then, I shall keep an eye on the girl."

"Hush! here is your friend, Marshal Richelieu!"

The marshal drew near, shaking his head.

"What is the matter, my dear marshal?" inquired the countess, with her most fascinating smile; "you seem dissatisfied with something."

"Don't you think, countess," said the duke, "that we all seem very grave, not to say sorrowful, for such a joyous occasion? Formerly, I know, we were much more gay when we went to meet a princess as amiable and as beautiful as this, the mother of his royal highness the dauphin. Was it because we were younger then?"

"No," answered a voice behind the marshal: "no, my dear marshal, but because the monarchy was not so old."

"Heaven and earth!" exclaimed the marshal, "it is the Baron de Taverney! Countess, one of my oldest friends, for whom I solicit your kindness—the Baron de Taverney Maison-Rouge."

"The father," whispered Jean and the countess to each other, as they stooped to salute the baron.

"To your carriages, gentlemen—to your carriages!" cried the major of the guards commanding the escort.

The two old gentlemen bowed to the countess and to the viscount, and both entered the same carriage, delighted to meet once more after so long a separation.

"And now," said the viscount, "shall I tell you another thing, my dear? I have as little love for the father as for the children."

"What a pity," replied the countess, "that that little wretch, Gilbert, ran away! He was brought up in their house, and could have told us so much about them."

"Pshaw! I shall find him again, now that I have nothing else to think about."

Their conversation was interrupted by the carriages being again put in motion.

After having passed the night in Compiègne, the two courts—the one the sunset, the other the dawn, of an age—set out on the following day for Paris—that yawning gulf which was to entomb them both!

CHAPTER XL.

THE PATRONESS AND THE PATRONISED.

It is now time that we should return to Gilbert, of whose flight the reader has been made aware by an imprudent exclamation of his protectress, Mademoiselle Chon, but of whom we have since heard nothing.

Our philosopher had cooled very much in his admiration of his patroness from the moment that he had, during the preliminaries of the duel between

Philip de Taverney and Viscount Jean, become aware that her name was Dubarry.

Often at Taverney, when, hidden by some hedge, he had followed Andrée and her father in their walks, he had heard the baron explain, at great length, all about the Dubarry family. The hatred of the old baron to Madame Dubarry—a feeling which in him, however, sprang from no dislike to what was in itself vicious—found a ready echo in Gilbert's heart, arising principally from her conduct being regarded by Andrée with contempt and reprobation, sentiments which may be taken as expressing the general opinion of the nation towards her whole family.

During the journey Chon was too much occupied with matters of a more serious import to pay any attention to the change of feeling which the knowledge of who were his travelling companions had produced in Gilbert. She reached Versailles, therefore, only thinking of how the viscount's wound, since it would not redound to his honour, might be turned to his greatest profit.

As to Gilbert, scarcely had he entered the capital—if not of France, at least of the French monarchy—than he forgot every unpleasant thought, and gave free scope to his undisguised admiration. Versailles, so majestic and stately, with its lofty trees already beginning to show symptoms of decay, touched his heart with that religious sadness which poetic minds always experience in contemplating the mighty works of nature, or those erected by the perseverance of man.

From this impression—a very novel one to Gilbert, and one against which his innate pride struggled in vain—he became silent and submissive, overcome by wonder and admiration.

The feeling of his inferiority crushed him to the earth. When the great lords in their stars and ribbons passed by him, how deeply did he feel the wretchedness of his attire! How inferior did he feel, even to the porters and footmen! How did he tremble when, in his hob-nailed shoes, he had to walk over the shining marble or polished inlaid floors!

At such times he felt that the protection of his patroness was indispensable to him, unless he wished to sink into absolute nothingness. He drew near her, that it might be seen he belonged to her; yet it was for the very reason that he needed her that he disliked her.

We are already aware that Madame Dubarry occupied at Versailles the magnificent suite of rooms formerly inhabited by the Princess Adelaide. The gold, the marble, the perfumes, the carpets, the hangings, at first intoxicated Gilbert; and it was only after these had become somewhat familiar to him that his understanding—dazzled by the reflected light which so many marvels cast on it—roused itself in the end to a clear perception of surrounding objects, and he found that he was in a little attic room, hung with serge—that there had been placed before him a basin of soup, some cold mutton, and a custard. The servant who brought these eatables had said, with the tone of a master, "Remain here!" and then left him.

But Gilbert soon found that the picture had its sunny side. From the window of his garret he could see the park of Versailles, studded with marble statues, and ornamented with fountains. Beyond were the dense and lofty summits of the trees, rolling like a sea of verdure; and farther still, the chequered plains, and the blue horizon of the neighbouring mountains. The only subject which occupied Gilbert's mind whilst eating his dinner was that, like the greatest lords of France, without being either a courtier or a lackey, without having been introduced there either by birth or baseness, he was living in Versailles, in the palace of the king.

His dinner, too, was an excellent one, when compared with those to which he had been accustomed. When it was over, he returned to his contemplation at the window. Meantime Chon had, as the reader may remember, joined her sister—had whispered that her business with Madame de Beąrn was happily executed—and then related aloud the accident which their brother met with at Lachaussée. This accident, although it made a great noise at first, was lost, as the reader has seen, in that great gulf which swallowed up so many things much more important —the king's indifference.

Gilbert had fallen into one of those reveries to which he often gave way while meditating on what was beyond his comprehension, or on what was impracticable for him to accomplish, when he was told that his patroness requested his presence. He took his hat, brushed it, compared by a glance his old worn coat with the new one of the footman, and saying to himself that that of the latter was a livery coat, he followed him. Yet, notwithstanding this philosophic reflection, he could not help blushing with shame to observe how little he resembled the men who elbowed him, and how much out of keeping he was with everything around him.

Chon was descending to the court at the same time as himself, with this difference, that she took the grand staircase, he a little back one more resembling a ladder. A carriage was waiting for them. It was a kind of low phaeton, containing seats for four persons, and resembled that historical vehicle in which the great king used to drive out with Madame de Montespan, Madame de Fontanges, and frequently with them the queen.

Chon got in and took the front seat, with a large box and a little dog beside her; the other seat was for Gilbert and a kind of steward called Monsieur Grange. Gilbert hastened to take the place behind Chon, in order to keep up his dignity; the steward, without thinking there was any degradation in the matter, placed himself behind the box and the dog.

As Mademoiselle Chon, like all who inhabited Versailles, felt joyous on leaving the great palace to inhale the air of the woods and the meadows, she became communicative, and was scarcely out of the town, when she turned half round and said, "Well, what do you think of Versailles, Mr. Philosopher?"

"It is very beautiful, madame; but are we quitting it already?"

"Yes—now we are going to our own home."

"That is to say, to *your* home, madame," said Gilbert, with the tone of a half-tamed bear.

"That is what I meant. I shall introduce you to my sister; try to please her. All the greatest noblemen in France are only too happy if they can succeed in doing so. By-the-bye, Grange, you must order a complete suit for this boy."

Gilbert blushed up to the eyes.

"What kind of suit, madame?" asked the steward. "The usual livery?"

Gilbert half started from his seat.

"Livery?" cried he, with a fierce look at the steward.

Chon burst into a laugh.

"No," said she; "you will order——but no matter, I will tell you another time. I have an idea, on which I wish for my sister's opinion. But take care to have the suit ready at the same time as Zamore's."

"Very well, madame."

"Do you know Zamore?" asked Chon, turning to Gilbert, who began to be very much alarmed by the conversation.

"No, madame, I have not that honour," replied he.

"He will be a young companion of yours; he is going to be governor of the château of Luciennes. Endeavour to gain his friendship—for Zamore is a good creature, in spite of his colour."

Gilbert was about to ask of what colour he was; but recollecting the reproof he had already received on the subject of curiosity, he refrained, for fear of another reprimand.

"I shall try," he answered, with a dignified smile.

They reached Luciennes. The philosopher saw everything; the road, lately planted—the shady slopes—the great aqueduct, which resembled a work of the Romans—the dense wood of chestnut trees—the varied and magnificent prospect of plains and woods stretching away on both sides of the Seine to Maisons.

"This, then," said he to himself, "is the country-seat which cost France so much, and of which I have heard the baron often speak!"

Bounding dogs and eager domestics ran out to welcome Chon, and interrupted Gilbert in the midst of his aristocratico-philosophical reflections.

"Has my sister arrived?" asked Chon.

"No, madame, but there are visitors waiting for her."

"Who are they?"

"The chancellor, the minister of police, and the Duke d'Aiguillon."

"Well, run quickly and open my sister's private cabinet, and tell her when she arrives that I am there; do you understand? Oh, Sylvia," added she, addressing a femme-de-chambre who had taken from her the box and the little dog, "give the box and Misapouf to Grange, and take my little philosopher to Zamore."

Sylvia looked all round, doubtless to find out what sort of animal Chon was speaking of; but her eyes and those of her mistress happening to rest on Gilbert at the same moment, Chon made a sign that the young man was the person in question.

"Come!" said Sylvia.

Gilbert, still more and more surprised at all that he saw, followed the femme-de-chambre, whilst Chon, light as a bird, disappeared by a side-door of the pavilion.

Had it not been for the commanding tone in which Chon addressed her, Gilbert would have taken Mademoiselle Sylvia to be a great lady rather than a femme-de-chambre, as her dress resembled Andrée's much more than Nicole's. The young and handsome waiting-woman took him by the hand with a gracious smile; for her mistress's words showed that, if not an object of affection, he was chosen at least through some new whim.

"What is your name, sir?" said she.

"Gilbert, mademoiselle," replied the young man, in a gentle voice.

"Well, sir, I am going to introduce you to my lord Zamore."

"To the governor of the château of Luciennes?"

"Yes, to the governor."

Gilbert pulled down his sleeves, dusted his coat a little, and wiped his hands with his handkerchief. He was in reality rather intimidated at the idea of appearing before so important a personage; but he recalled Chon's remark, "Zamore is a good creature," and recovered his courage. He was already the friend of a countess and a viscount; he was going to be the friend of a governor. "Well," thought he, "surely people calumniate the court; it is certainly easy enough to find friends in it: at least, as far as my experience goes, I have found every one kind and hospitable."

Sylvia threw open the door of an ante-room, which, from its splendour, might rather have been supposed a boudoir. The panels of the walls were of tortoise-shell, inlaid with copper gilt; and one might have imagined himself in the atrium of Lucullus, but that that ancient Roman used pure gold to decorate his walls.

There, in an immense arm-chair, half-buried in cushions, sitting cross-legged and gnawing chocolate cakes, reposed my lord Zamore, whom we already know, but whom Gilbert till now had never seen. The effect, therefore, which the governor of Luciennes produced on the mind of the philosopher was rather curiously depicted in his face. He stared with all his might at the strange being, for it was the first time he had ever seen a negro.

"Oh, oh!" cried he, "what is that?"

As for Zamore, he never raised his head, but continued to munch his cakes, rolling his eyes and showing the whites of them in the excess of his enjoyment.

"That," said Sylvia, "is my lord Zamore."

"That person?" said Gilbert, almost dumb with amazement.

"Yes, to be sure," answered Sylvia, laughing in spite of herself at the turn the scene was taking.

"He, the governor?" continued Gilbert. "That ape the governor of the château of Luciennes? Oh, mademoiselle, you are certainly jesting with me!"

At these words Zamore raised his head, and showed his white teeth.

"Me, governor," said he, "me not ape."

Gilbert looked from Zamore to Sylvia, and his glance, at first uneasy, became wrathful, when the young woman, in spite of all her efforts, burst into a fit of laughter. As for Zamore, grave and solemn as an Indian fetish, he plunged his black claw in a satin bag, and took out a handful of his cakes.

At this moment the door opened, and the steward entered, followed by a tailor.

"Here," said he, pointing to Gilbert, "is the person for whom you are to make the suit; take the measure according to the directions I gave you."

Gilbert mechanically submitted his arms and shoulders to be measured, whilst Sylvia and Grange were talking in another part of the room, and at every word of the steward the chambermaid laughed louder and louder.

"Oh, it will be delightful!" she said. "And will he wear a pointed cap, like Sganarello?"

Gilbert heard no more; he rudely pushed the tailor aside, and absolutely refused to submit to the rest of the ceremony. He knew nothing about Sganarello; but the name, and particularly Sylvia's mirth, plainly declared that he was some pre-eminently ridiculous personage.

"It is of no consequence," said the steward to the tailor; "don't hurt him! I suppose you can do very well with the measure you have taken."

"Certainly," replied the tailor, "for width does no harm in such suits. I shall make it very wide."

Whereupon Sylvia, the steward, and the tailor, walked off, leaving Gilbert with the little negro, who continued to gnaw his cakes and roll his great eyes. What an enigma was all this to the poor country lad! What fears, what anguish, did the philosopher experience, in seeing his dignity as a man evidently more compromised at Luciennes than ever it had been at Taverney!

However, he tried to talk to Zamore. It occurred to him that he might be some Indian prince, such as he had read of in the romances of M. Crebillon the younger. But the Indian prince, instead of replying, made the circuit of the apartment from mirror to mirror, admiring his splendid clothes like a bride in her wedding-dress. After that he got astride on a chair with wheels, and impelling it with his feet, he whirled round the ante-chamber some dozen times with a velocity which showed that he had made a profound study of that ingenious exercise.

Suddenly a bell rang. Zamore jumped up from his chair, and hurried through one of the doors in the direction of the sound. This promptness in obeying the silvery tinkling convinced Gilbert that Zamore was not a prince.

For a moment he entertained the idea of following him; but on reaching the end of the passage which led into a saloon, he saw so many blue ribbons and red ribbons, guarded by lackeys so bold, impudent, and noisy, that he felt a chill run through his veins, and, with the cold perspiration on his forehead, he returned to his ante-room.

An hour passed. Zamore did not return; Sylvia was seen no more. Any human face would have seemed then to Gilbert better than none, were it even that of the dreaded tailor who was to complete the mystification with which he was threatened.

Just at that moment the door by which he had entered the room opened, and a footman appeared and said, "Come!"

CHAPTER XLI.

THE PHYSICIAN AGAINST HIS WILL.

GILBERT felt it rather disagreeable to be obliged to obey a footman; nevertheless, he lost no time in following him, for he thought that now there was some prospect of a change in his condition, and it seemed to him that any change must be for the better.

Chon, now completely her own mistress, after having initiated her sister into the whole affair of the Countess de Bearn, was breakfasting very much at her ease in a charming morning-dress, beside a window shaded with acacias and chestnut-trees.

She was eating with an excellent appetite, and Gilbert remarked that a pheasant and truffles justified the relish with which she enjoyed her breakfast.

The philosopher, having entered the apartment, looked around to discover his place at the table, but there was no plate for him, and he was not even asked to sit down.

Chon merely cast a glance on him; then, after swallowing a little glass of wine, as clear and yellow as a topaz:

"Well, my dear doctor," said she, "how have you got on with Zamore?"

"How have I got on with him?"

"Yes; I hope you have become acquainted with him?"

"How could one make acquaintance with an animal like that, who never speaks, and who, when one speaks to him, only rolls his eyes?"

"Really you frighten me!" said Chon, without stopping one moment in her repast, and without her countenance showing any expression at all

corresponding to her words. "Your friendship is difficult to gain, then?"

"Friendship presupposes equality, madame."

"A noble maxim," said Chon. "Then you don't think yourself the equal of Zamore?"

"That is to say, that I do not think him my equal," replied Gilbert.

"In truth," said Chon, as if talking to herself, "he is charming!"

Then turning to Gilbert, she remarked his stately air.

"So, my dear doctor," said she, "you do not easily bestow your affections?"

"No, madame, not easily."

"Then I was mistaken when I thought you held me as your friend, and as a good friend too?"

"Madame," said Gilbert, very stiffly, "I feel for you naturally a liking, but——"

"Oh! a thousand thanks for your condescension! you really overwhelm me! And how long do you think, my scornful young gentleman, it would require to gain your affection?"

"A long time, madame; and there are even persons who, whatever they did, could never obtain it."

"Oh! then that explains the reason why, after having been eighteen years in the Baron de Taverney's house, you left it all at once. The Taverneys were not so fortunate as to obtain your affections—that was it, was it not?"

Gilbert blushed.

"Well? you don't answer," continued Chon.

"I have nothing to reply, madame, but that friendship and confidence must be merited."

"Oh! it appears, then, that your friends at Taverney did not merit your friendship and confidence?"

"Not all of them, madame."

"Ah! and what had those done who were so unfortunate as not to please you?"

"I do not complain of them, madame," answered he, proudly.

"Well, well. I perceive, Mr. Gilbert, that I am also one of the unfortunates excluded from your confidence; yet, believe me, it is not from any want of a desire to obtain it, but from my not knowing the right means of doing so!"

Gilbert bit his lip.

"But to shorten the matter," added she with an inquisitiveness which he felt must be for some object, "the Taverneys did not behave quite satisfactorily to you. Tell me, if you please, what was your occupation in their establishment?"

This was rather an embarrassing question, as Gilbert certainly could not say that he held any particular office at Taverney.

"Madame," said he, "I was—I was their confidential adviser."

At these words, which he pronounced most phlegmatically and philosophically, Chon was seized with such a fit of laughter that she threw herself back in her chair.

"Do you doubt my words?" asked Gilbert, frowning.

"Heaven preserve me from such a rash act, my dear friend! Really, you are so fierce, that one can scarcely venture to speak to you. I merely asked what sort of people the Taverneys were. Believe me, it was with no other intention than that of serving you, by assisting you to be revenged on them."

"If I am revenged, madame, it must be by myself."

"All very well; but we have a cause of complaint against the Taverneys ourselves; and, as you have one, or perhaps indeed several, we are naturally allies in our wish for revenge."

"You are quite mistaken, madame. Should I think of vengeance, mine could have no connexion with yours. You speak of all the Taverneys, while I have different shades of feeling towards different members of the family."

"The Chevalier Philip de Taverney, for instance, is he in the number of your friends or enemies?"

"I have nothing to say against the chevalier. He never did me either good or ill. I neither love him nor hate him: I am quite indifferent to him."

"Then you would not give evidence before the king, or before the Duke de Choiseul, against M. Philip de Taverney?"

"Give evidence about what?"

"About the duel with my brother."

"I should say all that I know about it, if I were called upon to give evidence."

"And what do you know about it?"

"The truth."

"But what do you call truth? That is a word whose meaning is very vague."

"No; not to the man who can distinguish between good and evil—between justice and injustice."

"I understand you; justice is on the side of the Chevalier de Taverney, injustice on that of Viscount Dubarry?"

"Yes, madame, so I think, if I must speak conscientiously."

"So this is the creature I picked up on the highway!" said Chon, sharply; "I am rewarded in this way by one who owes it to me that he is living!"

"That is to say, madame, who does not owe you his death."

"It is all the same."

"On the contrary, madame, it is very different."

"How different?"

"I do not owe my life to you; you merely prevented your horses from depriving me of it; besides, it was not you, but the postilion."

Chon fixed a penetrating look on the young logician, who showed so little scruple in the choice of his terms.

"I should have expected," said she, in a milder tone, and allowing a smile to steal over her features, "a little more gallantry from you. Come, come! you will give evidence against the chevalier, will you not?"

"No, madame—never."

"And why not, you foolish fellow?"

"Because the viscount was in the wrong."

"And, pray, how was he in the wrong?"

"By insulting the dauphiness; whilst, on the contrary, the chevalier——"

"Well, what?"

"Was right in defending her."

"Oh, ho! then it appears you belong to the dauphiness's party?"

"No; I am only for justice."

"Hold your tongue, Gilbert, you are a fool! Do not let any one hear you talk in that way here."

"Then permit me to remain silent when I am questioned."

"In that case, let us change the subject."

Gilbert bowed, in token of assent.

"And, now, my little friend," said the young lady, in rather a harsh tone of voice, "what do you intend to do here, if you refuse to make yourself agreeable?"

"Must I perjure myself in order to make myself agreeable?"

"Perjure! where did you learn all those grand words?"

"In the knowledge that I have a conscience to which I must be faithful."

"Pshaw!" said Chon; "when we serve a master, the master takes all the responsibility from our conscience."

"But I have no master," growled Gilbert.

"Indeed?—well, answer my question. What do you mean to do here?"

"I did not think that I required to study to be agreeable when I could be useful."

"You are mistaken, we can get useful people anywhere; we are tired of them."

"Then I shall go away."

"You will go away?"

"Yes, of course. I did not ask to come here; I am therefore free."

"Free?" exclaimed Chon, who began to get angry at this resistance to her will, a thing to which she was by no means accustomed. "Free? indeed you are not!"

Gilbert's brow contracted.

"Come, come!" said she, seeing by his frown that he would not easily renounce his freedom, "let us be friends. You are a handsome lad, and very virtuous, which makes you very amusing, were it only for the contrast which you will present to everybody else about us. Only keep a guard upon that love of truth of yours."

"I shall take care to keep it," said Gilbert.

"Yes; but we understand the word in two different senses: I mean to keep it to yourself. You need not exhibit it in the lobbies and ante-rooms of Luciennes or Versailles."

"Hum!" said Gilbert.

"There is no occasion for 'hum!' You are not so learned, Mr. Philosopher, but that you may learn something from a woman; and let this be your first maxim, 'to hold your tongue is not to lie'—remember that!"

"But if any one questions me?"

"Who would question you?—are you mad, my friend? Who in the world would ever think about you but myself? You have not yet founded a school, Mr. Philosopher, I presume. It will require some little searching and trouble before you happen upon a body of followers. You shall live with me; and before four times four-and-twenty hours, I shall transform you into a perfect courtier."

"I doubt that," replied Gilbert majestically.

Chon shrugged her shoulders.

Gilbert smiled.

"Now," said Chon, "to settle the matter at once, you have only to endeavour to please three persons."

"What three?"

"The king, my sister, and myself."

"What must I do to please?"

"Have you not seen Zamore?" asked the young lady, avoiding a direct reply.

"The negro?" said Gilbert, with the utmost contempt.

"Yes, the negro."

"What similarity is there between him and me?"

"Try to make a similarity of fortune, my good friend. That negro has already two thousand livres per annum from the king's privy purse. He is to be appointed governor of Luciennes; and even those that laugh at his thick lips and his black face call him sir, and even my lord!"

"I shall not be one of those," said Gilbert.

"Oh! I thought that the first principle of you philosophers was that all men are equal."

"That is the very reason that I shall not call Zamore my lord."

Chon was beaten with her own weapons. It was her turn to bite her lips.

"So you are not ambitious?" said she.

"Oh, yes, I am!" replied Gilbert, with sparkling eyes.

"And if I remember rightly, your ambition was to be a physician."

"I look upon the mission of soothing the pain and suffering of our fellow creatures as the noblest in the world."

"Well, your dream shall be realised."

"How so?"

"You shall be a physician—and the king's physician to boot."

"I?" cried Gilbert, "I, who know not even the first principles of medical science? You jest, madame."

"Well, and what does Zamore know about portcullises, and drawbridges, and counterscarps? He does not trouble his head about such things, yet that does not prevent him from being governor of Luciennes with all a governor's privileges."

"Ah, yes, yes, I understand!" said Gilbert, bitterly. "You have only one buffoon, and that is not sufficient. The king is getting tired and wishes for another."

"There," said Chon, "you are putting on your long face again. You make yourself so ugly, my little man, it is really quite delightful to see you. Keep all those ridiculous faces till the wig is on your head and the sugar-loaf hat over the wig, then, instead of being ugly, they will be comical."

Gilbert frowned more darkly still.

"I should think you might be glad of the post of the king's physician, when the Duc de Tresmes solicits that of my sister's monkey."

Gilbert made no answer. Chon thought of the proverb, "silence gives consent."

"As a proof that you are in favour," said she, "you shall not eat with servants."

"Ah! thank you, madame," replied Gilbert.

"I have already given orders to that effect."

"And where shall I eat?"

"Along with Zamore."

"I?"

"Yes, the king's governor and his physician may surely eat together; go now to your dinner."

"I am not hungry," answered Gilbert, rudely.

"Very well," said Chon, quietly; "you are not hungry now, but you will be in the evening."

Gilbert shook his head.

"To-morrow, then, or the day after to-morrow you may be. Oh, we

know how to tame rebels here; and if you continue obstinate we have besides the corrector of our pages to do our will!"

Gilbert shuddered and turned pale.

"Go to my lord Zamore now," she added, sharply; "you will be very well treated with him; his table is excellent. But no ingratitude, remember, or we shall teach you to be grateful."

Gilbert let his head fall on his breast, an invariable symptom that instead of going to reply, he was going to act.

The footman who had showed him to Chon's apartment waited at the door, and on his dismissal conducted him to a little dining-room adjoining the ante-room.

Zamore was at table. Gilbert took his place at the table, but he could not be made to eat.

Three o'clock struck, Madame Dubarry set off for Paris. Chon, who was to join her there a short time after, left instructions for the taming of her bear. Plenty of sweetmeats were to be his reward if he became docile; plenty of threats, and at last the dungeon, if he continued rebellious.

At four o'clock a complete suit, such as that worn by the 'medecin malgré lui,' was brought into Gilbert's apartment. There was the pointed cap, the wig, the black jacket, and the long black robe; in addition to these, they sent him a collar, a wand, and a large book. The footman who carried them in exhibited the various articles one by one. Gilbert no longer manifested any disposition to rebel. Grange entered after the footman, and instructed him how all the different parts of the dress should be worn. Gilbert listened most patiently.

"I thought," said he, at length, "that doctors formerly carried a little writing-case and a roll of paper?"

"Yes, faith, he is right," replied the steward; "go and bring him a long writing-case, which he can hang at his girdle."

"With pen and paper," added Gilbert, "I must have every part of my costume complete."

The footman hastened to execute the order, and at the same time to tell Chon how obliging Gilbert had become. Chon was so much delighted, that she gave the messenger a little purse with eight crowns in it, to hang with the writing-case at the girdle of this model of a physician.

"Thank you," said Gilbert to the person who brought it, "now may I be left alone to dress?"

"Well, make haste," replied Grange, "so that mademoiselle may see you before she goes to Paris."

"Half-an-hour," said Gilbert, "I only ask half-an-hour!"

"You may take three-quarters, if you like, my dear doctor," said the steward, shutting the door carefully, as if it had been that of his money-box.

Gilbert stole on tip-toe to the door, to be certain that the footsteps were dying away in the distance; then he glided to the window and looked down. There was a terrace about eighteen feet below him, covered with fine gravel, and bordered by lofty trees, which shaded the balconies of the windows.

Gilbert tore his long robe into three pieces, which he tied lengthways together, placed the hat on the table, and near it the purse and the following note:

"MADAME,

"Liberty is the first of blessings. Man's most sacred duty is to preserve it. You endeavoured to enslave me—I set myself free.

"GILBERT."

This letter he folded and addressed to Mademoiselle Chon, then he tied his twelve feet of serge to the bars of the window, slipped between them with the suppleness of an eel, and when at the end of his cord, dropped down to the terrace at the risk of breaking his neck. Though a little stunned by the fall, he lost not a moment in gaining the trees, among which he glided stealthily, and running as fast as his limbs would carry him, he disappeared in the direction of Ville d'Avray.

When, at the end of half-an-hour, they came to seek for him, he was already far beyond their reach.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE OLD MAN.

GILBERT had avoided the highway through fear of pursuit : he glided from one plantation to another, until he reached a sort of forest, and there he stopped. He had travelled a league and a half in about three-quarters of an hour.

The fugitive looked around him, and finding himself quite alone, he felt so much courage that he thought he might venture nearer the high-road. He therefore turned in the direction which, according to his calculation of his position, he supposed would lead to Paris.

But some horses which he saw near the village of Roquencourt, led by grooms in orange liveries, frightened him so much, that he was cured of all desire to be on the public road, and he returned to the woods.

"Let me keep in the shade of the trees," said he to himself; "if I am pursued, it will certainly be on the high-road. In the evening, from tree to tree, from one opening to another, I shall steal on to Paris. They say Paris is very large, and as I am little, I can easily hide there."

This idea was rendered still more agreeable to him by the fineness of the weather, the shade of the forest, and the softness of the mossy sward. The sun was now disappearing behind the hills of Marly, and the vegetation, dried by the scorching heat of the day, exhaled the sweet perfume of the spring—a mingled odour of the plant and of the flower.

Evening came on. It was the hour when, beneath the darkening skies, silence falls more softly and more deeply on all things, when the closing flower-cup shuts in the insect sleeping on its bosom. The gilded flies return with ceaseless hum to the hollow oak which serves them as an asylum ; the birds hurry silently to their nests, their wings rustling through the foliage ; and the only song which is heard is the clear whistle of the blackbird, and the timid warble of the redbreast.

Gilbert was familiar with the woods ; he was well acquainted both with their sounds and with their silence. Without giving way therefore to reflection, or to idle fear, he threw himself at full length on the heath, on which there yet remained here and there a red leaf of the preceding winter.

Far from feeling anxious or disturbed, he experienced rather a vague and boundless sense of joy. He inhaled with rapture the pure and free air, feeling, with the pride of a stoic, that he had once more triumphed over the snares laid for human weakness. What though he had neither bread, nor money, nor shelter,—had he not his beloved liberty? Was he not the free and uncontrolled master of his destiny?

He stretched himself, therefore, at the foot of a gigantic chestnut-tree,

where between two of its moss-covered roots he found a luxurious couch; then, gazing up at the calm and smiling heavens, he gradually sank to sleep.

The warbling of the birds awoke him; it was scarcely day. Raising himself on his elbow, stiff and painful from contact with the hard wood, he saw, in the dawning light, an opening from which three paths branched off through the wood. Here and there a rabbit scudded past him with its ears drooping, and brushing away the dew in its course, or a stag bounded past, with its sharp quick leaps, stopped to gaze at the unknown object under the tree, and then, alarmed, darted off with a more rapid flight.

Gilbert jumped to his feet, but no sooner had he done so than he felt he was hungry. The reader may remember that he had refused to dine with Zamore, so that since his breakfast in the attic at Versailles he had eaten nothing. On finding himself once more under the leafy arches of a forest, he who had so boldly traversed the great woods of Lorraine and Champagne, he almost thought himself beneath the trees of Taverney or among the brakes of Pierrefitte, surprised by the morning beams after a nocturnal expedition to procure game for his fair mistress.

But at Taverney he had always found by his side a partridge or a pheasant which he had shot, while here he found only his hat, rather the worse for his journey, and now nearly unfit to wear after the damps of the night.

It was not, then, all a dream, as he had on first awakening supposed. Versailles and Luciennes were realities, from his triumphal entry into the first till his forcible escape from the last.

But what more than all else served to recall him to his real position was his hunger, now becoming sharper and sharper every moment.

Then he mechanically sought around for some of those delicious mulberries, those wild cherries, or pungent roots, which, though acrid like the radish, the woodman loves to find as he plods in the morning to his labour with his tools on his shoulder. But this was not the season for such things, and besides, he saw around him only the ash, the beech, and other trees which bear no fruit.

"Well," said he to himself, "I will go direct to Paris. I cannot be more than three or four leagues from it—five, at the most—I can be there in two hours. What matter is it to suffer for a couple of hours, when I am sure after that of not having to suffer any longer? In Paris every one has bread, and the first artisan whom I meet will not refuse me bread for my work, when he knows that I am honest and industrious. In Paris I shall be able in one day to procure food for the next. What do I want more? Nothing, except that every succeeding day may see me increase in strength, in elevation of character, in greatness of mind, and approach nearer and nearer the object of my wishes."

Gilbert redoubled his speed: he now wished to find the high-road, but he had lost all means of directing his course. At Taverney, and in the woods around it, he knew the east and the west: every ray of light was to him an index of the hour. At night every star, although unknown to him by its name of Venus, Lucifer, or Saturn, served him as a guide. But here he was in a new world: he knew neither places nor objects, and was forced to seek his way, groping by chance.

"Fortunately," said he, "I saw finger-posts, on which the roads were pointed out."

He proceeded towards an opening where one of these directing-posts was placed. It pointed to three roads; one road led to Marais-Jaune,

another to Champ-de-l'Alouette, a third to Trou-Salé. Gilbert was not much assisted by this; he ran for three hours from one place to another, very often finding himself in the same spot from which he set out, and as far from the high-road as ever.

The perspiration poured down his face. A dozen times he threw off his coat and vest to climb some colossal chestnut-tree; but when he had reached its summit, he saw nothing but Versailles—Versailles now on his right, now on his left—Versailles, towards which, by some fatality, he seemed constantly impelled. He was half frantic with rage; but at last his efforts were so far successful that he first passed Viroflay, then Chaville, then Sèvres.

Half-past five sounded from the clock-tower of Meudon when he reached the Capuchin Convent between Sèvres and Bellevue; there, climbing on a cross at the risk of breaking it, and of being himself broken on the wheel by order of the parliament, as Sirven had been, he saw from that height the Seine, the village, and the smoke of the nearest houses. Beyond this he saw a great mass of buildings on the horizon, dimly distinguished in the morning vapours. That must be Paris, he thought; so feeling no longer either fatigue or hunger, he directed his course thither, and only stopped when out of breath from his excessive speed.

He was now in the woods of Meudon, between Fleury and Plessis-Piquet.

"Come," said he, looking around, "no false shame! I shall no doubt soon meet some early workman going to his day's labour with a loaf under his arm. I shall say to him, 'All men are brethren, and ought to help one another. You have more bread there than you will want this day, whilst I am dying of hunger,' and then he will give me the half of his loaf."

Hunger rendering Gilbert more and more philosophical, he continued his reflections.

"In truth," said he, "should not everything be in common among men on this earth? Has the Eternal Source of all things given to this man or to that the air which fertilises the soil, or the soil which produces the fruits? No. Some, it is true, have usurped a power over these things; but in the eyes of their Maker, in the eyes of the philosopher, no one possesses them. He who holds them is only the man to whom the Creator has lent them."

Gilbert, in all this, was but condensing by a natural instinct the vague and indefinite ideas of the period which men felt, as it were, floating in the air and hovering above their heads, like clouds impelled in one direction, and forming a threatening mass, from which at length the tempest would burst.

"Some," continued he, "retain by force what should belong to all. Well, then, from such we should tear by force what by right they should share with us. If my brother, who has too much bread, refuse me a portion of that bread, why, then, I shall take it from him by force; I shall follow the law of nature, the source of all sound sense and of all justice, since it arises from our natural wants. But I must yield if my brother say to me, 'The portion you ask for is that of my wife and of my children,' or if he should say, 'I am stronger than you, and I shall keep what I have, in spite of you.'"

He was in this temper of mind, which bore a striking resemblance to that of a hungry wolf, when he reached an open space among the trees: in its centre was a pond of muddy water, margined with reeds and water-

lilies, on the surface of which sported myriads of flies, dotting its glassy bosom with innumerable circles. The grassy slope which descended to the water's edge was closely studded with bunches of myosotis, and resembled a bed of turquoises and emeralds. The background of the picture, that is, the circle around the pool and the bank, was formed of a hedge of tall aspens, the interstices between whose golden trunks was filled up with the thick and leafy branches of the alder. Six paths led down to this spot; two of which, radiant with golden light, might have seemed to the imagination avenues to the palace of the glorious luminary of day; the four others, diverging like rays of a star, were lost in the blue depths of the forest.

This verdant saloon seemed fresher and more flowery than any other part of the wood. Gilbert entered it by one of the dark alleys.

The first object which he perceived, when, after having at a glance taken in its extent and circumference, his eye rested on nearer objects, was a man seated on the fallen trunk of a tree, near a deep ditch. The expression of his face was mild, yet refined and penetrating, and he was dressed in a coat of coarse brown cloth, breeches of the same, and a waistcoat of grey jean. His well-made sinewy legs were encased in grey cotton stockings, and his shoes with buckles were dusty here and there, yet showed on the soles and points traces of the morning dew.

Near him on the grass was placed a box, painted green, wide open, and filled with plants recently gathered. He had between his legs a stout stick, with a smooth round handle, and terminated at the opposite end by a little spade about two inches broad and three long.

Gilbert embraced in one rapid glance all these details which we have given; but what first drew his attention was a piece of bread, from which the old man from time to time broke off small pieces to eat, sharing them benevolently with the linnets and the wrens, who fixed from afar a longing eye on the food, stooped on it the moment it was thrown to them, and then, flew with joyful twittering to their thick foliage above.

The old man watched them with an eye at once gentle and animated, then, extending his hand to a checked handkerchief beside him, he drew from it a cherry from time to time, as a relish with his mouthful of bread.

"Ha! this is the man for me!" said Gilbert, brushing aside the branches of the trees and making four steps towards the solitary man, who looked up as he approached; but he had not advanced a third of the distance which separated them, when, perceiving the calmness and gentleness of the old man's countenance, he stopped and took off his hat.

The old man, finding himself no longer alone, cast a hurried glance on his box and then on his coat. He shut the former and buttoned up the latter.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BOTANIST.

GILBERT took courage and walked close up; but he opened his mouth and shut it again before he could utter a word. His philosophy wavered, and it seemed to him that he was about to entreat alms, and not to demand a right.

The old man observed this timidity, and it seemed to banish on his side all feelings of apprehension.

"Do you wish to speak to me, my friend?" said he, smiling, and laying down his bread on the trunk of the tree on which he sat.

"Yes, sir," replied Gilbert.

"What do you wish to say?"

"Sir, I see you throw your bread to the birds as if we were not told that God feeds them."

"Doubtless he does feed them, young man; but the hand of man is one of the means which he employs for that purpose. If you mean your words as a reproach, you are wrong; for neither in the silent wood nor in the crowded street is the bread ever lost which we cast from our hand. In the one place the birds pick it up, in the other the poor."

"Well, sir," said Gilbert, singularly moved by the soft penetrating voice of the old man, "although we are in the woods, I know a man who would dispute your bread with the birds."

"Can it be you, my friend?" cried the old man; "are you then, hungry?"

"Very, very hungry, sir, and if you will permit me——"

The old man seized his bread at once with eager compassion. Then reflecting for a moment, he looked at Gilbert with a keen and searching glance.

In fact, Gilbert so little resembled a starving man, that some consideration might be permitted. His coat was clean, except where it was in some places stained by its contact with the ground; his shirt was white, for at Versailles the evening before he had taken a clean one from his bundle, yet it was rendered damp by the dews; it was quite evident that he had passed the night in the wood.

Besides all this, his hands were white and slender, like those of a man of thought rather than of labour.

Gilbert did not want tact; he read the stranger's distrust and hesitation in his countenance, and hastened to anticipate further conjectures which he readily saw would not be favourable to him.

"We are always hungry, sir," he said, "when we have not eaten for twelve hours, and it is now twenty-four since I have had any food."

The emotion expressed on the young man's face, his tremulous voice, and his extreme paleness, all declared that his words were true. The old man hesitated, or rather feared, no longer; he held out to Gilbert his bread and the handkerchief containing his cherries.

"Thank you, sir, thank you," said Gilbert, gently pushing aside the handkerchief containing the cherries; "nothing but the bread, it is quite sufficient."

And he broke it in two, keeping one-half for himself and returning the other to the old man; then he sat down on the grass a couple of paces from his companion, who looked at him with increasing wonder.

The repast did not last very long. There was but little bread, and Gilbert was very hungry. The old man did not disturb his occupation by a word; he continued to observe him furtively but silently, bestowing apparently great attention on the plants and flowers in his box, which, when he opened it again, raised their odoriferous heads to the level of the edge, as if to inhale the air. But seeing Gilbert approach the pond, he cried hastily, "Do not drink that water, young man; it is rendered unwholesome by the remains of last year's plants, and by the spawn of frogs now on its surface. Take instead a few of these cherries, they will refresh you as much as the water. Take them, I beg of you, for you are not a forward guest, I see."

"It is true, sir, forwardness is the reverse of my nature, and I fear nothing so much as being intrusive. I have just experienced that at Versailles."

"Oh, you come from Versailles?" said the stranger, eyeing Gilbert with a strong expression of curiosity.

"Yes, sir."

"It is a rich town; one must be either very poor or very proud to be starving there."

"I am both, sir."

"You have had a quarrel with your master, perhaps?" said the stranger, while he apparently arranged the plants in his box, yet giving Gilbert a rapid interrogating glance.

"I have no master, sir."

"My friend," replied the old man, putting on his hat, "that is too ambitious a reply."

"It is the truth, however."

"No, young man. Every one has his master here below; we do not place our pride on a proper object when we say that we have no master."

"How?"

"Yes. Whether old or young, it is so ordered that we must submit to some ruling power. Some are ruled by men, others by principles; and the severest masters are not always those who order with the voice or strike with the hand."

"Be it so," said Gilbert. "Then I am governed by principles, I confess. Principles are the only masters which a reflecting mind can recognise without shame."

"And what are your principles? Let me hear them? You seem to be very young, my friend, to have any decided principles."

"Sir, I know that all men are brethren, and that every man from his birth is bound to fulfil certain duties towards his fellow-men. I know that God has bestowed on me a certain amount of value in society; and as I acknowledge the worth of other men, I have a right to exact from them that they should acknowledge mine, if I do not exaggerate its importance. So long as I do nothing unjust and dishonourable, I merit some regard, even were it only as a human being."

"Oh, oh!" said the stranger, "you have studied, I perceive."

"Alas! sir, I have not; but I have read the *Discours sur l'Inégalité des Conditions*, and *Le Contrat Social*. From those two books I have learned all that I know, and even all that I have dreamed."

At these words the eyes of the stranger flashed, and by an involuntary movement he was nearly destroying a beautiful xeranthemum, which he was trying to place securely in his box.

"And such are the principles which you profess?" said he.

"They may not be yours, sir," replied the young man; "but they are those of Jean Jacques Rousseau."

"But," said the stranger, with a distrust so apparent that it was rather humbling to Gilbert's vanity; "but are you sure you have rightly understood those principles?"

"I understand French, I think, sir, particularly when it is pure and poetical."

"You see that you do not," said the old man, smiling; "for what I ask you, if not poetical, is at least quite plain. I mean, have your philosophical studies enabled you to understand the groundwork of the system of——"

He stopped, almost blushing.

"Of Rousseau, sir?" continued Gilbert. "Oh, sir! I have not studied my philosophy in a college; but there is an instinct within me which revealed the excellence and utility of *Le Contrat Social*, above all other books that I had read."

"A dry book for a young man, sir—a barren subject for reverie at twenty years of age—a bitter and unfragrant flower for fancy in its spring-time!" said the old man with gentle sadness.

"Misfortune ripens man before his time, sir," answered Gilbert; "and as to reverie, if we give it a free and unrestrained course, it very often leads to ill."

The stranger opened his eyes, which he usually kept half closed in his moments of calmness and reflection, a peculiarity which gave an indefinable charm to his countenance.

"To whom do you allude?" asked he, reddening.

"Not to any one, sir," said Gilbert.

"Oh, yes, you do."

"No—I assure you I do not."

"You appear to have studied the philosopher of Geneva. Did you not allude to his life?"

"I know nothing of his life," replied Gilbert, frankly.

"Do you not?" and the stranger sighed. "Young man, he is a wretched creature."

"Impossible! Jean Jacques Rousseau wretched? Then there is no justice on earth. Wretched? The man who has devoted his life to the happiness of mankind?"

"Well, well! I see that you know nothing about him. Let us speak of yourself, my friend, if you please."

"I should prefer going on with our present subject. What can I tell you of myself worth hearing, sir, I, who am a mere nobody?"

"And besides, you do not know me, and are afraid of trusting a stranger."

"Oh, sir, what have I to fear from any one? Who can make me more wretched than I am? Recollect in what guise I came before you—alone, poor, hungry."

"Where were you going?"

"I was going to Paris. Are you a Parisian, sir?"

"Yes—that is to say—no."

"Which of the two am I to believe?" asked Gilbert, smiling.

"I abhor falsehood, and every moment I perceive how necessary it is to reflect before speaking. I am a Parisian, if by that is meant a man who has lived in Paris for a long time, and has mixed in its society; but I was not born in that city. But why do you ask?"

"It was from an association of ideas, arising out of our conversation. I thought if you lived in Paris you might have seen Rousseau, of whom we were speaking just now."

"I have indeed seen him sometimes."

"People look at him as he passes by—do they not? He is admired, and pointed out as the benefactor of the human race?"

"No; children, incited by their parents, follow him, and throw stones at him!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Gilbert, with the most painful astonishment, "but at least he is rich?"

"He has sometimes to ask himself, as you asked yourself this morning, 'Where shall I procure a breakfast?'"

"But poor as he is, he is esteemed—has influence—is respected?"

"He knows not at night, when he lies down, whether he may not in the morning awake in the Bastille."

"Oh, how he must hate mankind!"

"He neither loves them nor hates them; he is disgusted with them—that is all."

"How can we avoid hating people who treat us ill?" cried Gilbert; "I cannot comprehend that."

"Rousseau has always been free, sir—Rousseau has always been strong enough to rely on himself alone. It is strength and freedom which make men mild and kind—slavery and weakness alone make them malevolent."

"Those are my reasons for wishing to be free," said Gilbert, proudly. "I have long thought what you have just so well explained to me."

"But one may be free even in prison, my friend," replied the stranger. "Suppose Rousseau were in the Bastille to-morrow—and he certainly will be in it one day or other—he would think and write as freely as among the mountains of Switzerland. I have never thought, for my part, that man's freedom consists in his being able to do whatever he wills, but that he should not, by any human power, be forced to do what is against his will."

"Has Rousseau written what you have just said, sir?"

"I think he has."

"It is not in *The Social Contract*."

"No, it is in a new work of his, called *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker*."

"Sir," said Gilbert, warmly, "I think we shall agree on one point."

"What is that?"

"That we both love and admire Rousseau."

"Speak for yourself, young man; you are still in the age of illusions."

"We may be deceived about things, but not about men."

"Alas! you will learn at a later period that it is in the characters of men more than in aught else that we are deceived. Rousseau may be a little more just than other men, but believe me, he has faults, and very great ones."

Gilbert shook his head in a way which showed that he was far from being convinced; but notwithstanding this rather uncivil demonstration, the stranger continued to treat him with the same kindness.

"Let us return to the point at which we set out," said the stranger. "I was saying that you had quitted your master at Versailles."

"And I," replied Gilbert, but more mildly than before, "I answered that I had no master: I should have added that it depended entirely on myself to have one, and a very illustrious one too, and that I had refused a situation which many would have sought eagerly."

"A situation?"

"Yes; one in which I should only have had to talk for the amusement of great lords in want of such an occupation; but I thought that being young and able to study and push my way in life, I ought not to lose my most precious years, and compromise in my person the dignity of man."

"And you decided well. But have you any fixed plan of pursuing your career?"

"Sir, I should wish to be a physician."

"A noble profession. In it you may choose between real science, ever modest and self-sacrificing, and quackery, ever noisy and empty. If you

would become a physician, young man, study; if a quack, nothing but impudence and effrontery are necessary."

"But it requires a great deal of money to study, does it not, sir?"

"It certainly requires some money; I should not say a great deal."

"In fact, I believe that Jean Jacques Rousseau, who knows everything, studied at no expense."

"At no expense? Oh, young man!" said the stranger, with a sad smile, "do you call it no expense when we expend the most precious of God's gifts—innocence, health, sleep? These are what it has cost the philosopher of Geneva to acquire the little that he knows."

"The little?" repeated Gilbert, almost angrily.

"Yes; ask any one about him, and you will hear him spoken of as I speak of him."

"In the first place, he is a great musician."

"Oh, because King Louis XV. sang a song out of an opera of Rousseau's composing, that does not make it a good opera."

"But he is a great botanist; I have only seen a few odd sheets of his letters on botany, but you, who gather plants in the woods, have read them, I dare say."

"Oh, sometimes a person thinks himself a botanist, and is only——"

"Only what?"

"Only an herborist—and even——"

"And which are you—herborist or botanist?"

"A very humble herborist, and a very ignorant one, when I contemplate those marvels of God's creation—plants and flowers!"

"He is a Latin scholar."

"A very bad one."

"But I read in a newspaper that he translated an ancient author called Tacitus."

"Because, in his pride—alas! every man has his moment of pride—because, in his pride, he thought he could undertake anything. In the preface, however, to the first book—the only one which he translated—he says he does not understand Latin well; and Tacitus, who is a rude antagonist, soon wearied him. No, no, my good young man, in spite of your admiration, there is no such thing as a man of universal knowledge; and believe me, almost all men lose in depth what they gain in superficies. A little river, when swollen by the rains, may overflow its banks till it looks like a lake, but try to sail on it, and your boat will soon touch the ground."

"Then you think Rousseau a superficial man?"

"Yes; perhaps he presents a greater superficies than other men, but that is all."

"There are some, I think, who would be very glad to be superficial in his fashion."

"Do you intend that for me?" asked the stranger, with a good-natured frankness which quite disarmed Gilbert.

"Oh no, sir! I am too much delighted to converse with you to say anything disagreeable to you."

"In what way does my conversation delight you? Let me hear, for I do not think you would flatter me for a morsel of bread and a few cherries."

"You do me justice: I would not flatter to obtain the empire of the world. You shall hear why I am pleased: you are the first person who has ever spoken to me without haughtiness—who has reasoned with me in

a tone of kindness—as if speaking to a young man, and not to a child. —Although we did not agree about Rousseau, there has been in all that you have said something so calm and elevated, that it attracted me. I seem, when talking to you, to be in a richly-furnished saloon, the window-shutters of which are closed, but of which, notwithstanding the darkness, I can guess the richness and magnificence. I know that you could, if you wished, permit a ray of light to penetrate into your conversation which would dazzle me."

"But you yourself speak with a certain degree of refinement, which might lead me to think that you had received a better education than you have confessed."

"It is the first time, sir, that I have spoken so, and I am surprised my self at the terms which I have employed; there are even some of them of which I do not quite understand the signification, and which I have only heard once. I have met with them in books, but I did not comprehend them."

"Have you read much?"

"Too much; but I shall re-read."

The old man looked at Gilbert in astonishment.

"Yes, I read all that fell in my way, whether good or bad; I devoured all. Ah, if I had only had some one to direct me what I ought to forget and what I ought to remember! But excuse me, sir; I was forgetting that although your conversation is delightful to me, it does not therefore follow that mine must be so to you. You are herborising, and I perhaps interfere with your occupation."

Gilbert made a movement as if to withdraw, but at the same time with the greatest desire to be detained. The little grey eyes of the stranger were fixed on him, and they seemed to read his heart.

"No," said he, "my box is almost full; I only want a few mosses; I have been told there are some very beautiful hair-mosses in this quarter."

"Stay, stay," said Gilbert, "I think I have seen what you want on a rock just now."

"Far from this?"

"No, not more than fifty paces."

"But how do you know that description of moss?"

"I have lived almost all my life in the woods, sir; and then the daughter of the gentleman at whose house I was brought up was fond of botany; she had an herbal, and under each plant the name was written in her own hand. I have often looked at the plants and the writing, and then I knew them when I saw them again in the woods."

"Then you felt a taste for botany?"

"Oh, sir, whenever I heard Nicole say—Nicole was the waiting-maid of Mademoiselle Andrée—when I heard Nicole say that her mistress had been trying in vain to find some particular plant, I asked her to get me the form of that plant. Then, without knowing that I had asked for it, Mademoiselle Andrée would frequently sketch it in a moment, and Nicole would bring the drawing to me. I would then scour the fields, meadows, and woods until I had found the plant in question. When found, I dug it up and planted it in the lawn, where Mademoiselle Andrée could see it, and, full of joy, she would exclaim on discovering it, 'How strange! Here is the very plant which I have been searching for everywhere.'"

The old man looked at Gilbert with even more attention than he had yet bestowed on him; and if Gilbert, on reflecting on the purport of what he had said, had not cast down his eyes and blushed, he would have

seen that this attention was mingled with an expression of tender interest.

"Well, young man," said he, "continue to study botany; it will lead by a short route to a knowledge of medicine. God has made nothing in vain, and one day or other the utility of each plant will be distinctly marked in the book of science. Learn first to know simples, afterwards you can study their properties."

"Are there not schools in Paris?"

"Yes, and even some gratuitous ones. The school of surgery, for instance, is one of the benefits which we owe to the present reign."

"I shall follow the course prescribed in it."

"Nothing can be more easy, for your parents, seeing your inclinations, will no doubt provide you an adequate maintenance."

"I have no parents; but I am not afraid; I can provide for myself by my labour."

"Certainly, and as you have read Rousseau's works, you know that he says that every man, even a prince, ought to be taught some manual trade."

"I have not read *Emile*. I think it is in *Emile* he has given that recommendation?"

"It is."

"I have heard the Baron de Taverney turn that advice into ridicule, and regret that he had not made his son a carpenter."

"And what did he make him?"

"An officer."

The old man smiled.

"Yes, our nobles are all so. Instead of teaching their children any trade by which life might be preserved, they teach them the trade of killing. When a revolution comes, and exile after revolution, they will be forced to beg their bread from foreigners, or to sell them their swords, which is still worse. You, however, are not the son of a noble; you know a trade, I presume?"

"Sir, I have already told you I know nothing. Besides, I must confess that I have always had an invincible repugnance for all labours requiring strong rough movements of the body."

"Ah," said the old man, "you are lazy."

"Oh no; I am not lazy. Instead of putting me to the labour of a mechanic, place me in a room half dark, and give me books, and you shall see whether I will not work day and night at the labour of my own choosing."

The stranger looked at the young man's white and slender hands.

"It is a sort of predisposition or instinct," said he. "Sometimes this repugnance for manual labour leads to a good result; but it must be well directed. Well," continued he, "if you have not been at college, you have at least been at school?"

Gilbert shook his head.

"You can read and write?"

"My mother had just time before she died to teach me to read. My poor mother, seeing that I was not strong, always said, 'He will never make a good workman; he must be a priest or a learned man.' When I showed any distaste for my lessons, she would say, 'Learn to read, Gilbert, and you will not have to cut wood, drive a team, or break stones.' So I commenced to learn, but unfortunately I could scarcely read when she died."

"And who taught you to write?"

"I taught myself."

"You taught yourself?"

"Yes, with a stick which I pointed, and with some sand which I made fine by putting it through a sieve. For two years I wrote the letters which are used in printing, copying them from a book. I did not know that there were any others than these, and I could soon imitate them very well. But one day, about three years ago, when Mademoiselle Andrée had gone to a convent, the steward handed me a letter from her for her father, and then I saw that there existed other characters. M. de Taverney, having broken the seal, threw the cover away; I picked it up very carefully, and when the postman came again, I made him read me what was on it. It was, 'To the Baron de Taverney-Maison-Rouge, at his château, near Pierrefitte.' Under each of these letters I put its corresponding printed letter, and found that I had nearly all the alphabet. Then I imitated the writing; and in a week had copied the address ten thousand times perhaps, and had taught myself to write. You see, sir, that I am not extravagant in my expectations; since I can read and write—have read all that I could—have reflected on all that I read—why may I not perhaps find a man who requires my pen, a blind man who wants eyes, or a dumb man who wants a tongue?"

"But you forget that then you will have a master, and that is what you do not want. A secretary or a reader is only a sort of upper servant, after all."

"That is true," replied Gilbert, a little downcast; "but no matter, I must accomplish my object. I shall stir the paving-stones of Paris; I shall turn water-carrier if necessary, but I will attain my object, or I shall die in attempting it—and that will also be accomplishing an object."

"Well," replied the stranger, "you seem indeed full of ardour and courage—excellent qualities."

"But have you not a profession yourself, sir? You are dressed like a man employed in the finances."

The old man smiled sadly.

"I have a profession," said he; "every man ought to have one, but mine is a complete stranger to everything connected with finance. A financier would not come out herborising."

"Are you an herborist by profession, then?"

"Almost."

"Then you are poor?"

"Yes."

"It is the poor who are charitable, for poverty makes them wise, and good advice is better than a louis-d'or. Give me your advice then."

"I shall do more than that."

Gilbert smiled.

"I suspected that," said he.

"On how much do you think you could live?"

"Oh, very little!"

"But perhaps you do not know how expensive living is in Paris?"

"Yesterday I saw Paris for the first time from the hills near Luciennes."

"Then you are not aware that living in great towns is dear?"

"How much does it cost? Give me an idea."

"Willingly. For instance, what costs a sou in the country, costs three sous in Paris."

"Well," said Gilbert, "if I got any kind of shelter to rest in after my work, I should only need for my food six sous a day."

"Ah!" cried the stranger, "that is what I like, young man! Come with me to Paris, and I shall find you an independent profession by which you may live."

"Oh, sir!" cried Gilbert, with rapture; then, after a moment's reflection, "But it must really be an occupation; I must not live on alms."

"Do not be afraid of that, my child. I am not rich enough to bestow much in charity, and not foolish enough to do it without knowing the object better."

This little sally of misanthropy pleased Gilbert instead of giving him offence. "That is right!" said he; "I like such language. I accept your offer and thank you for it."

"So you decide upon coming to Paris with me?"

"Yes, sir, if you have no objection."

"Of course I have no objection, since I make you the offer,"

"What shall I have to do with you?"

"Nothing—but to work. But you shall regulate the quantity of your work yourself. You are young, you ought to be happy and free—even idle if you like, after you have gained the privileges of leisure," said the stranger, smiling in spite of himself; then, raising his eyes to heaven, he exclaimed with a deep sigh, "O youth! O vigour! O freedom!" Then he rose with the assistance of his stick.

As he said these words, an expression of deep and poetic melancholy overspread his fine features.

"And now," he continued, in a more cheerful voice, "now that you have got an employment, will you object to help me to fill another box with plants? I have some sheets of paper here in which we can class the others according to their orders. But, by-the-bye, are you hungry? I have still some bread."

"Keep it for the afternoon, if you please, sir."

"Well, but at least eat the cherries; they will be troublesome to carry with us."

"On that account I shall eat them. But allow me to carry your box; you will then be more at your ease, and I think, thanks to habit, my legs will tire yours."

"Ah, see! you bring me good fortune. There is the *vicris hieracioïdes*, which I sought in vain until now, and just under your foot—take care!—the *cerastium aquaticum*. Stop, stop! Do not gather them! Oh! you are not an herborist yet. The one is too moist to be gathered now, the other not advanced enough. We can get the *vicris hieracioïdes* in the afternoon when we pass this way, and the *cerastium* a week hence. Besides, I wish to show it growing to a friend whose patronage I mean to solicit for you. And now, show me the place where you saw the beautiful mosses."

Gilbert walked on, the old man followed him, and both disappeared in the shades of the forest.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MONSIEUR JACQUES.

GILBERT, delighted at his good fortune, which had hitherto befriended him in his utmost need, walked on, turning from time to time towards the stranger who had by a few words made him at once so submissive and docile. In this manner he led him to the spot where the mosses grew;

they were really splendid specimens, and when the old man had made a collection of them, they went in search of other plants.

Gilbert was a much better botanist than he thought himself. Accustomed to the woods from his infancy, he was familiar with all the plants that grew in them : but he knew them only by their vulgar names. When he named them in that manner, his companion told him the corresponding scientific term, which Gilbert, on finding another plant of the same family, would endeavour to repeat. If he miscalled the Greek or Latin term, the stranger repeated it in syllables, and gave him its derivation. Then he explained how it was adapted to the nature of the plant ; and thus Gilbert learned not only its botanical name, but the Greek or Latin one by which Pliny, Linnæus, or Jussieu had distinguished it.

From time to time he said, "What a pity, sir, that I cannot gain my six sous by botanising every day with you ! Oh, I should never rest a moment, and indeed I should not want even the six sous ; a piece of bread such as you gave me this morning would be sufficient for the whole day. I have just drunk from a spring of excellent water, as good as that at Taverney, and last night I slept under a tree here, and I am sure I slept better than I should have done under the roof of a château."

"My friend," replied the stranger, with a smile, "winter will come ; the plants will be withered and the spring frozen ; the north wind will whistle through the naked trees instead of this gentle breeze which agitates their leaves. You will then require a shelter, clothes, and fire, and you must be economical with your six sous that you may obtain them."

Gilbert sighed, gathered more plants, and asked more questions.

They spent thus the greater part of the day in the woods of Alnay, Plessis-Piquet, and Clamart-sous-Meudon.

Gilbert, according to his usual custom, soon became familiar with his companion, who questioned him with admirable address ; but there was in the young man something distrustful and circumspect, and he revealed as little as possible of his past life.

At Chatillon the stranger bought some bread and milk, but it was with difficulty he prevailed upon Gilbert to take the half of his purchase. Then, refreshed, they set out for Paris, that they might enter it whilst it was yet daylight.

The young man's heart beat high at the mere thought of being in Paris, and he could not conceal his emotion when, from the hill of Vanvres, he perceived St. Geneviève, the Invalides, Nôtre-Dame, and that vast sea of houses whose rolling billows seemed to lave the declivities of Montmartres, Belleville, and Menil Montant.

"O, Paris ! Paris !" murmured he.

"Yes, Paris, a mass of houses, an abyss of ills !" said the old man. "If the griefs and crimes which those houses inclose were to appear on their exteriors, from every stone would ooze a tear or a drop of blood !"

Gilbert heard, and repressed his enthusiasm, and thus checked, it soon died away of itself.

The suburb by which they entered the city was filthy and squalid : sick persons on litters were carried past him to the hospitals ; children, half-naked, were playing in the dirt among dogs, cows, and pigs. His brow grew dark.

"You think all this hideous," said the stranger ; "well, in a short time you will not even see these things ! People are rich who have a pig or a cow ; they will soon have neither one nor other. Their children give them

pleasure; soon they will bring them only sorrow. As to filth, you will always find that everywhere."

Gilbert had been inclined to look on Paris with a gloomy eye; the picture of it which his companion drew did not, therefore, displease him. The old man, at first prolix in his declamation, gradually sank into abstraction and silence as they approached the centre of the city. He seemed so full of anxious thoughts, that Gilbert had not courage to ask him the name of a large garden which he saw through a railing, nor of a bridge by which the Seine was crossed. The garden was the Luxembourg—the bridge the Pont Neuf. At last, however, as they still proceeded onwards, and as the stranger's meditation appeared to have changed into uneasiness, he ventured to say, "Do you live far from this, sir?"

"Not very far," answered the stranger, whom this question evidently made more morose.

They proceeded along the Rue du Four, passing the magnificent Hôtel de Soissons, the windows and the principal entrance of which look on the street, but whose splendid gardens extend to the streets of Grenelle and Deux-Ecus.

They passed by a church which Gilbert thought very beautiful—he stopped a moment to gaze at it.

"That is a beautiful building," said he.

"It is Saint Eustache," replied the old man; then, looking up, "Eight o'clock! Good Heavens! make haste, young man, make haste!"

The stranger strode on faster: Gilbert followed him.

"By-the-bye," said he, after some minutes of a silence so ungenial that Gilbert began to feel uneasy, "I forgot to tell you that I am married."

"Oh!" said Gilbert.

"Yes; and my wife, like a true Parisian housekeeper, will scold us, I dare say, for coming in so late. Besides, I must tell you, she is very suspicious of strangers."

"Do you wish me to leave you, sir?" said Gilbert, whose heart was chilled by these words.

"Not at all, not at all! I invited you to come home with me, and you shall come."

"I follow you, then," answered the young man.

"Now, here we are!—down this street—to the right!"

Gilbert raised his eyes, and, by the last gleams of expiring day, he read at the corner of the street, above a grocer's shop, the words—"Rue Plastrière."

The old man continued to hurry on faster, and as he approached nearer his house, his feverish agitation seemed to increase. Gilbert feared to lose sight of him, and, in his haste, knocked against the passers-by, the burdens of the porters, and the poles of carriages and litters. His companion seemed to have completely forgotten him in his hurried progress, absorbed as he was by one disagreeable thought.

At last he stopped before a door, in the upper part of which was a grating. A little string hung out through a hole—the stranger pulled it, and the door opened. He then turned, and seeing Gilbert standing undecided whether to enter or not, he said, "Come on!" Gilbert obeyed, and the old man shut the door.

After a few steps forward in the dark, Gilbert's foot struck against a narrow, steep staircase; but the old man, accustomed to the place, had already mounted half the flight. Gilbert overtook him, ascended with him, and stopped when he stopped. This was on an old half worn-out mat, in a lobby with two doors in it.

The stranger pulled a cord near one of these doors, and a sharp tinkling bell rang; then, from the interior of one of the rooms was heard the shuffling of slip-shod feet dragging along the floor. The door opened, and a woman of from fifty to fifty-five years of age appeared.

Two voices immediately arose together—one, that of the stranger; the other, that of the woman who opened the door.

"Am I too late, dear Therese?" he murmured, timidly.

"A pretty hour, Jacques, to sup at!" she replied, rudely.

"Come, come, we shall soon make all that right!" replied the stranger, affectionately, shutting the door, and then turning to receive the tin box from Gilbert's hands.

"Oh, a porter to carry your box!" cried the old woman; "it only wanted that! So you could not carry all that nasty stuff of grass and herbs yourself. Indeed! a porter for Monsieur Jacques! I beg pardon, he is becoming quite a great gentleman!"

"Well, well, be calm, Therese," quietly replied he whom she addressed so insolently by the name of Jacques, arranging his plants on the mantelpiece.

"Pay him, then, and send him away; we don't want a spy here."

Gilbert turned as pale as death, and sprang to the door. Jacques stopped him.

"This gentleman," said he, with less timidity than he had shown at first, "is not a porter, still less a spy. He is a guest whom I have brought."

The old woman's arms fell powerless by her side.

"A guest?" said she. "Certainly, we are in great need of guests."

"Come, Therese," said the stranger, in a tone still affectionate, but in which a shade of derision might be detected; "light a candle—I am heated, and we are thirsty."

The old woman still grumbled, loudly at first, but gradually subsiding. Then she proceeded to strike a light.

Whilst the dialogue lasted, and the murmurs succeeding it, Gilbert remained silent and immovable, nailed to the floor within a step or two of the door, which he deeply regretted having entered.

Jacques perceived what the young man was suffering.

"Come forward, Monsieur Gilbert," said he; "come forward, I beg of you."

The old woman turned to see the person to whom her husband spoke with this affected politeness, and Gilbert had thus an opportunity of seeing her yellow, morose face, by the first light of the miserable candle which she had placed in a copper candlestick.

That face awoke in him, at the first glance, a violent antipathy. It was wrinkled, pimpled, and filled, as it were, with gall; the eyes were sharp but meaningless; there was also a pretended softness spread over those vulgar features at that moment, which the old woman's voice and manner so completely contradicted, that Gilbert's dislike was if possible increased.

The old woman, on her side, found the thin pale face, circumspect silence, and stiff demeanour of the young man little to her taste.

"I see, gentlemen," said she, "that you are hot, and I am sure you must be thirsty. Indeed, passing a day in the shade of the woods is so fatiguing, and stooping from time to time to gather a plant so laborious an occupation!—for this gentleman is a botanist also, no doubt—that is the trade of people who have no trade!"

"The gentleman," replied Jacques, in a voice becoming every moment firmer, "is a kind, good young man, who did me the honour to bear me

company all the day, and whom my Therese will, I am sure, receive like a friend."

"There is enough of supper for two, but not for three," grumbled she.

"He is easily satisfied, and so am I."

"Oh, yes—all very fine!—I know what that means. I tell you plainly, there is not bread enough for your double moderation, and I am not going down three flights of stairs to get any more, I assure you. Besides, at this hour the baker's would be shut."

"Then I shall go down myself," replied Jacques, frowning; "open the door, Therese."

"Oh, but——"

"I will go down, I tell you!"

"Well, well," said the old woman, in a discontented voice, but at the same time yielding to the absolute tone which her opposition had called forth from Jacques; "am I not always ready to satisfy your whims? I think we can do with what we have. Come to supper."

"Sit by me," said Jacques, leading Gilbert into the next room, where a little table was prepared for the master and mistress of the house. On it were laid two plates, beside one of which a napkin folded and tied with a red ribbon, and beside the other, one tied with white, pointed out where each took his seat.

The walls of the room, which was small and of a square shape, were covered with a pale blue paper, with a white pattern, and its only ornaments were two large maps. The rest of the furniture consisted of six straw-seated chairs, the aforesaid table, and a kind of cabinet filled with stockings to be mended.

Gilbert sat down. The old woman placed a plate before him, then she brought a spoon, worn thin by use, a knife and fork, and a brightly polished pewter goblet.

"Are you not going down?" asked Jacques.

"It is not necessary," she replied, in a sharp tone, showing the spite which filled her heart at his having gained a victory over her. "It is not necessary. I found half a loaf in the pantry. That makes a pound and a half of bread for us all—we must make it do."

So saying, she put the soup on the table.

Jacques was helped first, then Gilbert, and the old woman ate out of the tureen. All three were very hungry. Gilbert, intimidated by the discussion on domestic economy to which he had given rise, kept his appetite as much within bounds as possible; but, notwithstanding, he had finished his soup first. The old woman cast a wrathful look on his plate, so prematurely empty.

"Who called to-day?" inquired Jacques, in order to change the current of her thoughts.

"Oh, everybody, as usual!" replied she. "You promised Madame de Boufflers her four pieces, Madame d'Escars two airs, Madame de Penthièvre a quartette with an accompaniment—some persons came themselves, others sent for what they wanted. But what of that? Monsieur was botanising; and as people cannot amuse themselves and do their work at the same time, the ladies had to go without their music!"

Jacques did not say a word, to the great astonishment of Gilbert, who expected to see him get angry; but as it only concerned himself, it did not disturb him.

To the soup succeeded a morsel of boiled beef, served on a common earthenware dish, scraped and cracked by the edge of the knife. Jacques

helped Gilbert moderately enough, for Therese had her eye upon him; then he took a piece about the same size for himself, and handed the dish to her.

The old woman seized on the loaf and cut a slice for Gilbert—so small a slice that Jacques blushed. He waited until she had helped him and herself—then he took the loaf into his own hands.

"You shall cut your own bread, my young friend," said he; "and cut it according to your appetite, I beg of you. Bread ought to be doled out only to those who waste it."

A moment afterwards appeared a dish of kidney-beans stewed in butter.

"Look how green they are!" said Jacques. "They are of our own keeping—we have an excellent method for that." And he passed the dish to Gilbert.

"Thank you, sir," said the latter, "but I have eaten quite enough—I am not hungry."

"The young gentleman is not of your opinion about my kidney beans," said Therese, angrily. "He prefers, no doubt, fresh gathered ones; but they are early vegetables, and rather above our means."

"No, madame. On the contrary, I think these appear very nice indeed, and I am sure I should like them; but I never eat of more than one dish."

"And you drink water?" said Jacques, handing him the jug.

"Always, sir."

Jacques poured out a small glass of wine for himself.

"And now, wife," said he, "you will begin and get this young man's bed ready—he must be tired, I am sure."

Therese let her knife and fork fall from her hands, and fixed her angry eyes on her husband.

"Bed? Are you mad? If you bring any one to sleep here, he must sleep in your own bed, I can tell you. You are really becoming deranged! Or perhaps you are going to take up a boarding-house? If you are, you may get a cook and waiting-maid; it is quite enough for me to be your servant, without being servant to other people!"

"Therese," replied Jacques, resuming his serious and firm tone: "Therese, pray listen to me. It is only for one night. This young man has never set foot in Paris before. He came under my protection, and I will not permit him to sleep in an inn; I will not, though I should, as you say, have to resign to him my own bed."

After this second exhibition of firmness and resolution, the old man awaited the result.

Therese, who had watched him whilst he spoke, appearing to study every muscle of his face, seemed now to understand that she must give up the contest—and she suddenly changed her tactics. She was certain of being beaten if she continued Gilbert's enemy; she therefore began to fight for him, but certainly like an ally who intended treachery.

"Well, well," said she: "since the young gentleman has come home with you, he must be a friend of yours; and it is better, as you say, that he should remain under our roof. I shall make him a bed as well as I can in your study, near the bundles of papers."

"No, no," said Jacques, quickly. "A study is not a fit place to sleep in—he might set fire to the papers."

"A great misfortune, truly!" muttered Therese to herself. Then she added aloud: "In that case, I can put him in front of the cupboard in the ante-room."

"No, no!"

"Well, you see, however much I wish it, I can't manage it, unless he take your bed or mine."

"I do not think, Therese, you are looking in the right quarter."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, we have the garret, you know."

"The garret? The loft, you mean."

"No, it is not a loft. It is a room, a little garret-like I confess, but wholesome, and with a splendid view of the neighbouring gardens—a thing very unusual in Paris."

"Oh, what matters it, sir," exclaimed Gilbert, "whether it be a loft or not? Even if it were, I should be but too glad of it, I assure you."

"But stay—that cannot be," cried Therese; "it is there that I dry our linen."

"The young man will not disturb it, Therese. You will take care, will you not, my young friend, that no accident happens to my good housekeeper's linen? We are poor, and any loss is serious to us."

"Oh, do not be afraid, sir."

Jacques rose and approached Therese. "I do not wish, my dear Therese," said he, "that this young man should be ruined. Paris is a dangerous place for a stranger; while here, we can watch over his conduct."

"Then you have taken him to educate? He will pay for his board, this pupil of yours?"

"No; but I answer for it he shall cost you nothing. From to-morrow he will provide for himself. As for lodging, since the garret is almost useless to us, let us do him this slight service."

"How well idle people understand each other!" muttered Therese, shrugging her shoulders.

"Sir," said Gilbert, more wearied even than his host of this struggle for a hospitality which was so humbling to him, and which was only gained by fighting for every inch of ground—"Sir, I have never yet given trouble to any one, and I shall certainly not begin with you, who have been so good to me. Permit me, therefore, to leave you, if you please. I saw, near the bridge which we crossed, some trees with benches under them. I shall sleep very well, I assure you, on one of those benches."

"Yes," said Jacques, "to be taken up by the watch as a vagabond."

"Which he is," muttered Therese to herself, as she removed the supper things.

"Come, come, young man," Jacques added, "there is, as well as I can remember, a very good straw mattress up stairs, and that is surely better than a bench?"

"Oh, sir, I have never slept on anything but a straw mattress," said Gilbert; then correcting this truth by a slight fib, "a feather bed always overheated me," added he.

Jacques smiled. "Straw is certainly cool and refreshing," said he. "Take that bit of candle which is on the table, and follow me."

Therese did not even look at them. She sighed—she was defeated.

Gilbert rose gravely and followed his protector. Passing through the ante-room he saw a cistern of water. "Sir," asked he, "is water dear in Paris?"

"No, my friend; but were it dear, water and bread are two things which no man has a right to refuse his fellow-man who begs for them."

"Oh, the reason I asked is, that at Taverney water cost nothing, and cleanliness is the luxury of the poor."

"Take some, my friend," said Jacques, pointing to a large earthenware pitcher; and he preceded the young man to his sleeping apartment, surprised to find united in a youth of his age all the strength of mind of the lower classes with all the refined tastes of the higher.

CHAPTER XLV.

MONSIEUR JACQUES' GARRET.

THE staircase, narrow and steep even at its commencement in the hall below, became still more narrow and more steep from the third story, on which Jacques lived, to the rooms above. It was therefore with considerable difficulty that they reached what was really a loft. Therese was right for once; it was neither more nor less than a loft, divided into four compartments, three of which were uninhabited.

To say the truth, they were all, except the one destined for Gilbert, uninhabitable.

The roof sloped precipitately down and formed an acute angle with the floor. In the middle of the slope, a skylight in a broken frame, without glass, admitted both light and air; the former rather scantily, the latter superabundantly, particularly during high winds in winter.

Fortunately summer was near; and yet, in spite of the approaching warm weather, the candle which Jacques held was nearly blown out on entering the loft.

The mattress of which Jacques had spoken so boastingly lay on the floor, and at the first glance seemed to be in itself the whole furniture of the place. Here and there were piles of old printed papers, which had turned yellow at the edges from age, and in the midst of them were some books half gnawed away by rats.

From two cords which were stretched from one side of the loft to the other, and the first of which was nearly strangling Gilbert, hung, dancing in the night breeze, several paper bags containing kidney-beans dried in their pods, a few bundles of aromatic herbs, some household linen, and several articles of female attire almost in rags.

"It is not a very handsome place," said Jacques, "but sleep and darkness make an humble cabin equal to a sumptuous palace. Sleep, my young friend, as you ought to sleep at your age, and to-morrow morning you may believe that you have slept in the Louvre. But, above all things take care of fire."

"Yes, sir," said Gilbert, a little bewildered at all that he had heard and seen.

Jacques left the room smiling, then returned.

"To-morrow we shall have some conversation," said he; "you will have no objection to work, will you?"

"You know, sir, that on the contrary, to work is my strongest wish."

"That is right," said Jacques, and he turned away.

"To work in an honourable way, you understand, sir," added the punctilious Gilbert.

"I know of no other, my young friend; so then, good-night."

"Good-night, and thank you, sir."

Jacques retired, closed the door, and Gilbert was left alone in his garret.

At first amazed, then stupefied at the thought that he was in Paris,

he asked himself could this really be Paris? could there be in Paris such rooms as his?

He then reflected that, in reality, Monsieur Jacques was bestowing charity on him, and as he had seen alms bestowed at Taverney, not only did his surprise subside, but gradually gave way to gratitude, so much difference was there in the manner of performing the two acts.

Then, candle in hand, and taking every precaution against fire, as recommended by Jacques, he went over all parts of his garret; thinking so little of Therese's clothes that he would not take even an old gown to serve him for a quilt.

He stopped at the piles of printed papers. They roused his curiosity to the utmost; but they were tied up, and he did not touch them.

With outstretched neck and eager eye he passed from these parcels to the bags of kidney-beans. The bags were made of very white paper also printed, and were fastened together by pins.

In making rather a hurried movement, he touched the rope with his head and one of the bags fell. Paler and more frightened than if he had been discovered breaking open a strong box, Gilbert hastened to gather up the beans scattered on the floor and to return them to the bag.

During this process he naturally looked at the paper, and mechanically read a few words. These words excited his interest; he pushed aside the beans, and sitting down on his mattress he read with eagerness, for the words were so completely in unison with his own character and feelings that he could almost imagine them to have been written, not only for, but by himself. They were as follows:

"Besides, grisettes, tradesmen's daughters, and filles-de-chambre never presented any temptation to me—I was influenced by ladies alone. Every one has his whim, and this was mine. I do not agree with Horace on this point. It is not, however, mere admiration of rank or wealth which induces this preference; it is the superior delicacy of complexion, the soft white hands, the becoming attire, the air of delicacy and order exhibited in the whole person, the taste which appears in every gesture and every expression, the dress so much finer and better formed, the shoes of more delicate workmanship, the more judicious blending of ribbons and laces, the hair arranged with superior care. Thus adorned, I should prefer the plainest features to beauty without them. This preference may be—and I feel that it is—very ridiculous, but my heart has made it almost in spite of me."

Gilbert started, and the perspiration burst from his forehead—his thoughts could not be better expressed, his desires more clearly defined, nor his tastes more perfectly analysed. But Andrée, though thus adorned, did not require these auxiliaries to set off "the plainest features." All these were subservient to her peerless beauty.

After this came a delightful adventure of a young man with two young girls. Their setting out all together on horseback was related, and all the pretty little fears of the ladies were described. Then their nocturnal return was told in the most charming style.

Gilbert's interest increased; he unfolded the bag and read all that was in it; then he looked at the pages that he might if possible go on regularly with what was so interesting. The paging was not regular, but he found seven or eight bags which seemed in the narrative to have some connection. He took out the pins, emptied the beans on the floor, put the sheets together, and proceeded to read.

He was thinking of the happiness he should have, passing the whole

night in reading, and the pleasure he should find in unpinning the long file of bags yet untouched, when suddenly a slight crackling was heard; the candle, being low, had heated the copper around it, it sank in the melted grease, a disagreeable odour filled the loft, and in a moment all was darkness.

This event took place so quickly that Gilbert had no time to prevent it, and he could have wept with vexation at being interrupted in the middle of his reading. He allowed the papers to slip from his hands on the heap of beans near his bed, threw himself on his mattress, and in spite of his disappointment soon slept profoundly.

He did not awake until roused by the noise of taking off the padlock with which Jacques had closed the door the night before. It was broad daylight, and as Gilbert opened his eyes he saw his host enter softly.

His eyes immediately rested on the kidney-beans scattered on the floor, and the bags turned into their original form. Jacques' glance had taken the same direction.

Gilbert felt the blush of shame covering his cheeks, and scarcely knowing what he said, he murmured, "Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, my friend," said Jacques; "have you slept well?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you a somnambulist?"

Gilbert did not know what a somnambulist was, but he understood that the question referred to the beans no longer in their bags, and to the bags despoiled of their contents.

"Ah, sir," said he, "I understand why you ask me that question. Yes, I have been guilty of this misconduct; I humbly confess it, but I think I can repair it."

"Yes. But why is your candle burned out?"

"I sat up too late."

"But why sit up?" asked Jacques distrustfully.

"To read, sir."

The old man's eyes wandered with increasing interest all round the garret.

"This first leaf," said Gilbert, taking up the first page which he had unpinned and read, "this first leaf, which I looked at by chance, interested me so much; but, sir, you, who know so much, do you know what book this is taken from?"

Jacques glanced carelessly at it and said, "I don't know."

"It is a romance, I am sure," said Gilbert, "and a charming romance too."

"A romance? Do you think so?"

"Yes; for love is spoken of here as in romances, only much better."

"Well, as I see at the foot of this page the word 'confessions,' I think that it may be a true history."

"Oh no! The man who speaks thus does not speak of himself. There is too much frankness in his avowals, too much impartiality in his judgments."

"You are wrong," answered the old man quickly; "the author wished to give an example of that kind to the world."

"Do you know who is the author?"

"The author is Jean Jacques Rousseau."

"Rousseau?" cried the young man impetuously.

"Yes; these are some leaves from his last work."

"So this young man, as he speaks of himself here, poor, unknown, almost

begging on the highway, was Rousseau, that is to say, the man who was one day to write 'Le Contrat Social,' and 'Emile?'"

"The same—or rather not the same," said the old man, with an expression of deep melancholy—"no, not the same: the author of the 'Le Contrat' and 'Emile' is the MAN disenchanted with the world, life, glory, almost with the Deity himself; the other—the other Rousseau is the CHILD entering a world rosy as the dawn—a child with all the joys and all the hopes of that happy age! Between the two Rousseaus lies an abyss which will for ever prevent them from being one—thirty years of misery!"

The old man shook his head, let his arms sink by his side, and appeared lost in reverie.

Gilbert was delighted, not saddened, by what he heard. "Then," said he, "all that I read last night was not a charming fiction?"

"Young man, Rousseau has never lied; remember his motto, 'Vitam impendere vero!'"

"I have seen it, but as I do not know Latin I did not understand it."

"It means to give one's life for the truth. But my wife must have risen by this time; let us go down; a man determined to work can never begin the day too early. Rouse, young man, rouse."

"And so," said Gilbert, "it is possible that a man of such an origin as Rousseau may be loved by a lady of rank? Oh heavens! what it is to inspire with hope those who, like him, have dared to raise their eyes above them!"

"You love," said Jacques, "and you find an analogy between your situation and that of Rousseau?"

Gilbert blushed, but did not answer this interrogation.

"But all women," said he, "are not like those of whom I read; how many are proud, haughty, disdainful, whom it would be only folly to love!"

"And yet, young man," replied the other, "such occasions have more than once presented themselves to Rousseau."

"That is true, sir; pardon me for having detained you; but there are some subjects which intoxicate me, and some thoughts which make me almost mad."

"Come, come! I fear you are in love!" said the old man.

Instead of replying, Gilbert commenced to make up the bags again with the help of the pins, and fill them with the kidney-beans. Jacques looked on.

"You have not been very splendidly lodged," said he; "but, after all, you have had what was necessary, and if you had been earlier up you might have inhaled through your window the perfume of the garden trees, which, in the midst of the disagreeable odours that infest a great town, is certainly very agreeable. The gardens of the Rue Jussienne are just below, and to breathe in the morning the fragrance of their flowers and shrubs is to a poor captive a happiness for all the rest of the day."

"It certainly conveys an agreeable sensation to me," said Gilbert; "but I am too much accustomed to those things to pay any particular attention to them."

"Say rather that you have not yet been long enough the inhabitant of a town to know how much the country is to be regretted. But you have done; let us go down."

And motioning Gilbert to precede him, he shut the door and put on the padlock.

This time, Jacques led his companion directly to the room which Therese the evening before had named the study. Its furniture was composed of glass cases containing butterflies, plants, and minerals, a bookcase of walnut-tree wood, a long narrow table, with a green and black

baize cover worn out by constant use, on which were a number of manuscripts arranged in good order, and four arm-chairs stuffed and covered with hair-cloth. Every article was waxed and shining, irreproachable as to neatness and cleanliness, but chilling to the eye and the heart, so dim and gray was the light admitted through the drab curtains, and so far removed from comfort were the cold ashes on the black hearth.

A little harpsichord of rosewood on four straight legs, the strings of which vibrated as the carriages passed in the street, and the slight ticking of a timepiece placed over the fire-place, were all that seemed to give life to this species of tomb.

But Gilbert entered it with profound respect. The furniture seemed to him almost sumptuous, since it was, as nearly as possible, the same as that of the château of Taverney, and the polished floor, above all, struck him with awe.

"Sit down," said Jacques, pointing to a second little table placed in the recess of a window, "and I shall explain what occupation I intend for you."

Gilbert eagerly obeyed.

"Do you know what this is?" asked the old man, showing him some paper ruled with lines at equal distances.

"Certainly," said he; "it is music paper."

"Well, when one of these leaves has been filled up properly by me, that is, when I have copied on it as much music as it will contain, I have earned ten sous; that is the price which I fixed myself. Do you think you can learn to copy music?"

"Oh yes, sir! I think so."

"But does not all this little black dotting of spots joined together by single, double, and triple strokes, swim before your eyes?"

"Yes, sir. At the first glance I cannot distinguish them well, but on looking more closely I shall be able to separate one note from another; for instance, here is a Fa."

"And the note above that, crossing the second line?"

"That is Sol."

"Then you can read music?"

"I know only the names of the notes; I do not understand their value."

"Do you know when they are minims, crotchets, quavers, and semi-quavers?"

"Oh yes; I know that."

"And that mark?"

"It is a rest."

"And that?"

"A sharp."

"And that?"

"A flat."

"Very well! And so, with this ignorance of yours," said Jacques, his eye beginning to darken with the distrust which seemed natural to him, "with this ignorance of yours, you speak of music as you spoke of botany, and as you would have spoken of love had I not cut you short."

"Oh, sir," replied Gilbert, blushing, "do not ridicule me!"

"No, my child; I am only surprised at you. Music is an art which is seldom learned until after other studies, and you told me you had received no education; in fact, that you had been taught nothing."

"That is the truth, sir."

"But you could not have found out of yourself that this black point was a Fa."

"Sir," said Gilbert, looking down with an embarrassed air, "in the house where I lived there was a—a—young lady—who played on the harpsichord."

"Oh! the same who studied botany?"

"Yes, sir; and she played very well."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and I adore music!"

"All that does not account for your knowing the notes?"

"Sir, Rousseau says that the man who enjoys the effect without seeking to know the cause, allows half his powers to lie dormant."

"Yes; but he also says that man in acquiring that knowledge loses his joyousness, his innocence, and his natural instincts."

"What matters it, if he find in the search itself an enjoyment equal to all the pleasures which he loses?"

Jacques turned towards him, still more surprised. "Ha!" said he, "you are not only a botanist and a musician, but also a logician."

"Ah, sir, I am unfortunately neither a musician, a botanist, nor a logician! I can distinguish one note from another, one sign from another, that is all."

"You can sol-fa, then?"

"No—not in the least, sir."

"Well, no matter. Will you try to copy this? Here is some ruled paper, but take care of wasting it; it is very dear: and now I think of it, it would be better for you to take some common paper, rule it yourself, and make a trial on it."

"Oh! sir, I shall do whatever you recommend. But allow me to say, that this is not an occupation for my whole lifetime. It would be much better to become a public writer than copy music which I do not understand."

"Young man, young man, you speak without reflection. Is it by night that a public writer gains his bread?"

"No, certainly."

"Well, listen to me: with practice a man can copy in two or three hours at night five or even six of these pages; for that he will get three francs. A man can live on that sum; you will not contradict that, you, who would be content with six sous? Thus, you see, with two hours' work at night you could earn sufficient to enable you to attend the school of surgery, of medicine, and of botany."

"Oh," cried Gilbert, "now I understand, and I thank you from my very heart." And so saying, he seized eagerly the paper which the old man offered him.

CHAPTER XLVI.

WHO MONSIEUR JACQUES WAS.

GILBERT set to work with the greatest ardour, and his paper was soon covered with careful copies of what was placed before him. The old man looked at him for some time, and then sat down at the other table to correct printed sheets like those of which the bags containing the kidney-beans had been made.

They had passed three hours in this way, and the timepiece had just struck nine, when Therese entered hurriedly. Jacques raised his head.

"Quick, quick!" said she, "come into the other room! Here is another prince come to visit you. When will this procession of grandees be over? I only hope he will not take it into his head to breakfast with us, as the Duke de Chartres did the other day."

"Who is this prince?" asked Jacques, in a low voice.

"Monseigneur the Prince de Conté."

At this name Gilbert let fall on his paper a *sol* which looked much more like a dinner plate than a note.

"A prince! A grandee!" he muttered to himself.

Jacques left the study smiling; Therese followed, and closed the door behind her.

Then Gilbert looked around, and finding that he was alone, sat bolt upright with astonishment.

"But where am I then?" exclaimed he. "Princes, highnesses, calling on Monsieur Jacques! The Duke de Chartres, the Prince de Conté, calling on a copier of music!"

He approached the door to listen; his heart beat strangely.

The first greetings were over between Jacques and the prince, and the latter was speaking.

"I should have liked," he said, "to take you with me."

"Why so, monseigneur?" asked Jacques.

"To introduce you to the dauphiness. A new era is opening for philosophy, my dear philosopher."

"A thousand thanks for your kindness, my lord, but it is impossible for me to accompany you."

"Yet, six years ago, you accompanied Madame de Pompadour to Fontainebleau?"

"I was six years younger then. Now I am chained to my arm-chair by infirmities."

"And by misanthropy."

"And if it were so, my lord, you must allow that the world is not worth the trouble of putting one's self out of the way for it."

"Well, I shall let you off for St. Denis, and the grand ceremonial; but I must take you to Muette, where her royal highness will sleep the night after to-morrow."

"Then her royal highness arrives at Saint Denis the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, with all her retinue. Come, two leagues are easily travelled. Report bespeaks her highness an excellent musician; a pupil of Glück's."

Gilbert heard no more.

The day after to-morrow the dauphiness and all her retinue would be at St. Denis; these words suggested only one idea to him, that the next day but one Andrée would be two leagues distant from him.

Of the two feelings which he experienced, the stronger overcame the weaker. Love put an end to curiosity. For a moment it seemed to him as if he had not room to breathe. He ran to a window to open it, but it was fastened inside with a padlock, no doubt to prevent those on the opposite side of the street from ever having an opportunity of seeing what passed in the study.

He sank on his chair.

"Oh, I will never listen at doors again," said he; "I must not try to penetrate the secrets of this man, apparently so humble, whom a prince

calls his friend and wishes to present to the future Queen of France—to the daughter of emperors—whom Mademoiselle Andrée addressed almost kneeling at her feet. And yet perhaps I might hear something of Mademoiselle Andrée. No, no! I should seem like a lackey; La Brie used to listen at doors."

And he courageously retired from the door. But his hands trembled so much that he could not write, and indeed he required some more exciting pursuit to divert his thoughts; he therefore seized a book on the other table.

"'The Confessions!'" he read with joyful surprise, "'embellished with a likeness of the author, Jean Jacques Rousseau,' and I have never yet seen a likeness of Rousseau!" and he hastily turned the silk paper which covered the engraving.

No sooner did it meet his eye than he uttered a cry of amazement. At that moment Jacques opened the door.

Gilbert compared his face with the likeness in the book, which he held in his hand, then, pale and trembling, he let the volume fall, exclaiming, "I am in the house of Jean Jacques Rousseau!"

"Let me see, my child, how you have copied your music," said Rousseau, smiling, and inwardly better pleased with this involuntary homage than with many of the thousand triumphs of his glorious life. And passing by the trembling Gilbert, he approached the table and commenced to examine his work.

"Your notes are not badly formed," said he; "but they are carelessly joined together. Here, there should be a rest to make the time complete. Then, see, the bars which divide it are not quite straight. Make the semibreves by two semicircles; it is not important that they should join. The note made perfectly round is ungraceful, and the stalk does not join with it so well. Yes, my friend, you are indeed in the house of Jean Jacques Rousseau."

"Oh, pardon me, sir, for all the foolish words which I have uttered!" exclaimed Gilbert, clasping his hands and ready to fall on his knees.

"Was it necessary that a prince should come to visit me," said Rousseau, shrugging his shoulders, "to enable you to discover in me the unhappy, persecuted philosopher of Geneva? Poor child! Happy in your ignorance of persecution!"

"Oh, yes, I am happy, very happy! But it is in seeing you, in knowing you, in being near you!"

"Thanks, my child, thanks. But it is not enough to be happy, you must work. Now that you have made a trial, take this rondeau and copy it on some proper music-paper; it is short and easy—above all things observe neatness. But how did you discover——?"

Gilbert, with a swelling heart, took up the volume and pointed to the portrait.

"Oh yes, my likeness burned in effigy on the first page of the 'Emile!' However, the auto-da-fè diffuses light as well as the rays of the sun."

"Ah! sir, my wildest dreams never exceeded this! To live with you! My highest ambition never hoped for more!"

"You cannot live with me, my friend," said Jean Jacques, "for I do not take pupils; as for guests, you perceive that I am not rich enough to entertain them, certainly not to receive them as regular inmates."

A cold perspiration stood on Gilbert's forehead. Rousseau took his hand.

"However," said he, "do not despair. From the moment I first saw

you, I have been studying your character. In it there is much which requires to be corrected, but there is also much to esteem. Learn to subdue your inclinations. Distrust your pride, that gnawing worm which is the bane of philosophy. Copy music, and wait patiently for better times.'

"Oh, heavens!" said Gilbert, "I feel bewildered when I think of what has happened to me."

"What has happened to you is very simple and very natural, my child; you were flying I know not whence, for I did not seek to know your secret, and in your flight you met a man gathering plants in a wood. He had bread, you had none; he shared his with you. You did not know where to seek an asylum for the night, he offered you the shelter of his roof. The man might have been called by any name, he happened to be called Rousseau. That is the whole affair. This man said to you, the first precept of philosophy is—man, suffice for thyself. Now, my friend, when you have copied your rondeau, you will have gained your bread for this day. Copy your rondeau, therefore."

"Oh, sir, what kindness!"

"As for your lodging, that is yours into the bargain; only, no reading at night, or if you must have a candle, let it be your own; otherwise, Therese will scold. In the meantime, are you hungry?"

"Oh, no, sir," replied Gilbert, in a choking voice.

"There is enough left from our supper of last night to serve for this morning's breakfast. Do not stand on ceremony; this repast is the last you will get at my table, unless by invitation, if we remain friends."

Gilbert made a movement as if to speak, but Rousseau interrupted him.

"There is in the Rue Plastrière," continued he, "a modest eating-house for mechanics; you can dine there on moderate terms, for I shall recommend you to the proprietor. In the meantime, come and breakfast."

Gilbert followed Rousseau without daring to reply. He was completely subdued; but at least it was by a man superior to most other men.

After a few mouthfuls he left the table and returned to his task. He spoke truly; his emotion was so great that it had taken away his appetite. During the whole day he never raised his eyes from the paper, and at eight in the evening, after having torn three sheets, he had succeeded in copying legibly and neatly a rondeau of four pages.

"I will not flatter you," said Rousseau, "it is not yet well done, but it is legible; what you have done is worth ten sous: here is the money."

Gilbert took it with a low bow.

"There is some bread in the cupboard, M. Gilbert," said Therese, on whom the young man's modest demeanour, mildness, and industry, had produced a favourable impression.

"Thank you, ma'am," replied Gilbert, "believe me, I shall never forget your kindness."

"Here," said she, holding the bread out to him.

He was about to refuse, but looking at Rousseau he saw, by the slight frown which contracted his piercing eye, and the curl which hovered on his delicately formed lips, that the refusal would wound him.

"I accept your kind offer," said he.

He then withdrew to his little chamber, holding in his hand the six silver sous and the four copper ones which he had just received.

"At last," said he, on entering his garret, "I am my own master. But stay—not yet, since I hold in my hand the bread of charity."

And although he felt hungry, he laid down the piece of bread on the sill of the skylight, and did not eat it. Then, fancying that sleep would enable him to forget his hunger, he blew out his candle and stretched himself on his straw pallet.

He was awake before daybreak on the following morning, for in truth he had slept very little during the night. Recollecting what Rousseau had said about the gardens, he leaned out of the sky-light, and saw below him the trees and shrubs of a very beautiful garden, and beyond the trees the hotel to which the garden belonged, the entrance to which was from the Rue Jussienne.

In one corner of the garden, quite surrounded by shrubs and flowers, there stood a little summer-house, the windows of which were closed. Gilbert at first thought that the windows were closed on account of the earliness of the hour; but observing that the foliage of the trees had grown up against the shutters, he was convinced that the summer-house must have been unoccupied since the preceding winter at least. He returned, therefore, to his admiring contemplation of the noble lime-trees, which partially concealed from view the main body of the hotel.

Two or three times, during his survey, Gilbert's eyes had turned towards the piece of bread which Therese had cut for him the evening before; but although hunger pleaded loudly, he was so much the master of himself that he refrained from touching it.

Five o'clock struck. Gilbert was persuaded that the door of the passage must now be open; and washed, brushed, and combed, for Rousseau had furnished his garret with all that was necessary for his modest toilet, he descended the stairs, with his piece of bread under his arm.

Rousseau, who this time was not the first a-foot, and who from a lingering suspicion perhaps, and the better to watch his guest, had left his door open, heard him descend, and narrowly observed his movements. He saw Gilbert leave the house with the bread under his arm; a poor man came up to him, and he saw Gilbert give him the bread, and then enter a baker's shop which was just opened and buy some more.

"Now," said Rousseau, "he will go to a tavern and his poor ten sous will soon vanish."

But he was mistaken. Gilbert ate his bread as he walked along; then, stopping at a fountain at the corner of the street, he took a long draught; ate the rest of his bread; drank again, rinsed his mouth, washed his hands, and returned towards the house.

"Ha!" said Rousseau, "I fancy that I am luckier than Diogenes, and have found a man!" And hearing Gilbert's footsteps on the stairs, he hastened to open the door.

The entire day was spent in uninterrupted labour. Gilbert brought to his monotonous task activity, intelligence, and unshrinking assiduity. What he did not perfectly comprehend he guessed, and his hand, the slave of his iron will, traced the notes without hesitation and without mistake. By evening he had copied seven pages, if not elegantly, at least with scrupulous correctness.

Rousseau examined his work with the eye both of a critical judge and a philosopher. As a critical judge he criticised the forms of the notes, the fineness of the joinings, the spaces for the rests and dots; but he acknowledged that there was a decided improvement since the day before, and he gave Gilbert twenty-five sous.

As a philosopher he admired the strength of resolution which could bend the ardent temperament and active and athletic frame of a young man

of eighteen to such constant and unceasing labour. For Rousseau had discovered that in that young heart there lurked an ardent passion; but whether ambition or love he had not yet ascertained.

Gilbert gazed thoughtfully at the money which he had received, it was a piece of twenty-four sous and a single sou. He put the sou in his waistcoat pocket, probably with the other sous which were remaining from the little sum of the day before, and grasping the silver with evident satisfaction in his right hand, he said:

"Sir, you are my master, since you give me work and also lodge me in your house gratis. I think it only right, therefore, that I should communicate to you all my intentions, otherwise I might lose your regard."

Rousseau looked at him with a lowering eye. "What are you going to do?" said he. "Have you any other intention than that of working to-morrow?"

"Sir—for to-morrow, yes. With your permission, I should like to be at liberty to-morrow."

"What to do?" said Rousseau, "to idle?"

"Sir," said Gilbert, "I wish to go to St. Denis."

"To St. Denis?"

"Yes; her highness the dauphiness is to arrive there to-morrow."

"Ah!—true; there are to be festivities in honour of her arrival."

"That is it, sir."

"I thought you less of a sight-seer, my young friend," said Rousseau. "I gave you credit, at first, on the contrary, for despising the pomps of absolute power."

"Sir——"

"Look at me—me, whom you pretend to take for a model. Yesterday one of the royal princes came to invite me to court. Well, observe, citizen as I am, I refused his invitation; not to go as you would go, my poor lad, on foot, and standing on tiptoe to catch a glimpse, over the shoulder of a guardsman, of the king's carriage as it passes, but to appear before princes—to be honoured by a smile from princesses."

Gilbert nodded his approbation.

"And why did I refuse?" continued Rousseau, with vehemence. "Because a man ought not to have two faces; because the man who has written that royalty is an abuse ought not to be seen bending before a king. Because I—who know that every festivity of the great robs the people of some portion of that comfort which is now scarcely sufficient to keep them from revolt—I protest by my absence against all such festivities."

"Sir," said Gilbert, "believe me, I comprehend all the sublimity of your philosophy."

"Doubtless; and yet, since you do not practise it, permit me to tell you——"

"Sir," said Gilbert, "I am not a philosopher."

"Tell me, at least, what you are going to do at St. Denis."

"Sir, I am discreet."

Rousseau was struck by these words; he saw that there was some mystery concealed under this obstinate desire, and he looked at this young man with a sort of admiration which his character inspired.

"Oh, very well!" said he, "I see you have a motive; I like that better."

"Yes, sir, I have a motive; one, I assure you, in no way connected with an idle love for pomp or show."

"So much the better.—Or, perhaps, I should say, so much the worse.

"I can go into the church and wait there in prayer."

"I am sorry, madame, that I cannot permit you to wait there."

"Oh, then I am mistaken! I am not in the house of God!" cried the stranger, with such vehemence of voice and look, that the nun, alarmed, dared no longer oppose her wishes.

"If you be really in great distress," said she, "I shall try what I can do."

"Oh! tell her royal highness," added the foreigner, "that I come from Rome, that I have made only two halts on the road, one at Mayence, the other at Strasbourg; that during the last four days I have only taken the time absolutely necessary for myself and my horse to regain strength to continue our journey."

"I shall tell her, sister," and the nun hastened off.

A moment after a lay sister appeared, followed by the portress.

"Well?" exclaimed the stranger, impatient to know what reply had been sent.

"Her royal highness says, madame," replied the lay sister, "it is quite impossible to give you an audience this evening; but that nevertheless the hospitality of the convent shall be extended to you, since you are in such urgent want of an asylum. You may follow me, therefore, sister, and if you have made so long a journey as you say, and are fatigued, you can retire to rest at once."

"But my horse?"

"Rest assured he shall be taken care of, my sister."

"He is as gentle as a lamb. He is called Djerid, and comes when addressed by that name. I entreat you will take care of him, for he is a most valuable animal."

"He shall be treated as if he were one of the king's horses."

"Thanks."

"In the meantime, conduct madame to her apartment," said the lay sister to the portress.

"Not to my apartment—to the church! I do not require sleep, but prayer."

"The chapel is open, my sister," said the nun, pointing to a little side door which gave admittance to the church.

"And I shall see the superior in the morning?" asked the stranger.

"To-morrow morning? That is also impossible."

"Why so?"

"Because to-morrow morning there will be a grand reception."

"And for whom can a reception be more necessary than for an unfortunate like me?"

"Her royal highness the dauphiness will do us the honour to spend two hours here on her way through town to-morrow. It is a great honour for our convent, and a high solemnity for us poor nuns; so that, you understand, the abbess is most anxious that everything should be worthy of the royal guests we expect."

"But in the meantime," said the stranger, looking around with a shudder, "whilst I wait the leisure of your august superior, shall I be in safety here?"

"Undoubtedly, my sister. Our house is a refuge even for the guilty, much more for——"

"For fugitives," said the stranger. "It is well; then no one can enter here?"

"No one—that is, not without an order."

"Oh, but if he procures an order! Good heavens! He who is so powerful that his power at times terrifies me."

"He?—who?" asked the nun.

"Oh, no one—no one."

"The poor creature is deranged, I fear," murmured the nun to herself.

"The church! The church!" repeated the stranger, so wildly as in some degree to justify this suspicion.

"Come, my sister, let me lead you to it."

"Yes, yes, I am pursued, look you—quick! The church!"

"Oh, the walls of St. Denis are strong!" said the nun, with a compassionate smile. "Believe me, after such a journey as you have described, you had much better go and rest in a good bed than bruise your knees on the stones of our chapel."

"No, no! I wish to pray—I wish to pray that God will rescue me from my pursuers!" cried the young woman, hurriedly entering the church by the door which the nun pointed out, and shutting the door behind her.

The nun, curious as all nuns are, hastened round to the principal entrance, and, advancing softly, saw the unknown praying and sobbing before the altar, her face bowed to the ground.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

PARISIANS.

THE nuns had informed the stranger correctly, when they told her that the chapter of the convent was assembled in conclave. Madame Louise of France presided at the meeting, her first exercise of supreme authority, and assisted in their deliberation as to the best means of giving the daughter of the Cæsars a reception worthy of her august character and station.

The funds of the convent were rather low. The late abbess, on resigning her functions, had carried away with her a large portion of the lace, which was her private property, as well as the reliquaries and ostensoirs, which it was the practice of superiors, who were all taken from the highest families, to lend to their convents, on devoting themselves to the service of God from the most worldly motives.

Madame Louise, on learning the intended visit of the dauphiness, had sent an express to Versailles, and the same night a wagon had arrived loaded with hangings, lace, and ornaments, to the value of six hundred thousand livres.

Consequently, when the tidings were spread of the royal splendour which was to be exhibited at the reception of the dauphiness, all the ardent curiosity of the Parisians was redoubled—those same Parisians whom Mercier describes as provoking only a smile when seen in private life, but when assembled in masses arousing reflections more calculated to make us weep and tremble.

Therefore, from earliest dawn, the citizens of the capital, having learned from public report the route which the dauphiness was to take, began to issue from their dens, and, at first in parties of ten or twenty, then in hundreds, and finally in thousands, poured out towards St. Denis.

The French and Swiss guards, and the regiments stationed at St. Denis, were under arms, and formed a line on each side of the road to keep back the waves of the living tide which rolled on towards the gates of the cathedral, and mounted even to the sculptured projections of the building.

A sea of heads appeared everywhere, children's peeping from above the porches of doors, men's and women's thronging the windows. Besides these, thousands of curious spectators, who had arrived too late to secure places, or who, like Gilbert, preferred their liberty to the constraint and inconvenience of being shut up during the whole day in one spot, swarmed like ants on every side, climbing the trees which bordered the road from St. Denis to Muette, or dispersed here and there waiting for the procession.

The cortége, although still possessing a numerous train of sumptuous equipages, and troops of domestics in splendid liveries, had considerably diminished after leaving Compiègne ; for, except for the great lords, it was found impossible to keep pace with the king, who doubled and tripled the usual stages, by means of relays posted on the road.

Those of lesser note had therefore remained at Compiègne, or had taken post-horses and returned to Paris to give their stud a breathing interval. But after a day's repose at their own domiciles, masters and domestics now thronged towards St. Denis both to witness the preparations and to get another glimpse of the dauphiness, whom they had already only partially seen. And then, besides the court carriages, were there not those of the parliament, the financiers, the rich merchants, the ladies of fashion and those of the opera ? Were there not, in addition, hired horses and carriages, as well as the *caravans*, which rolled towards St. Denis, crammed with the good citizens of Paris, both male and female, who managed to arrive by this means somewhat later than they could have accomplished the distance on foot ? It may easily be imagined, therefore, what a formidable army directed its march towards St. Denis on the morning of the day when the gazettes and placards announced that the dauphiness was to arrive, forming into a dense mass before the Convent of the Carmelites, and, when no more room could be obtained within the privileged enclosure, stretching away in long lines on the roads by which the dauphiness and her suite were to arrive and depart.

Now, let any one picture to himself in this crowd, which was the terror even of the Parisian, Gilbert, insignificant in appearance, alone, undecided, ignorant of the localities, and too proud even to ask a question—for since he was in Paris he had determined to pass for a Parisian—he who had never seen a hundred people assembled together in his life.

At first he saw pedestrians thinly scattered along the road ; at La Chapelle they began to increase, and at St. Denis they seemed to rise out of the ground, and presented much the appearance of an immense field bristling with ears of corn. For a long time past Gilbert had seen nothing, lost as he was in the crowd ; he could not look over the heads of those around him, and, swept along in the throng, he blindly followed where the concourse of spectators led him.

At last he saw some children perched on a tree, and longed to imitate their example, but he dared not take off his coat. He made his way, however, to the foot of the tree, just as one of those unfortunates, who like himself were deprived of all view of the horizon, and who staggered onwards, trampling others and being trampled on themselves, was struck by the bright idea of questioning their lucky neighbours perched in safety on the branches, and learned from one of them that there was a large space vacant between the convent and the guards. Gilbert, emboldened by this intelligence, ventured in his turn to ask whether the carriages were yet in sight.

They had not yet appeared—but on the road, about a quarter of a league

beyond St. Denis, a great cloud of dust was plainly visible. This was what Gilbert wished to know; the carriages not being in sight, it was now his business to ascertain precisely by what route they would approach: but nevertheless he held on his way, traversing the crowd in perfect silence —a mode of procedure which in Paris leads irresistibly to the conclusion that the person practising it is either an Englishman or deaf and dumb.

Scarcely had Gilbert extricated himself from the multitude, when he perceived, seated behind a ditch, the family of an humble tradesman at breakfast.

There was a blue-eyed daughter, tall and fair, modest and timid.

There was the mother, a fat, laughing little woman, with white teeth and rosy cheeks.

There was an aunt, tall, bony, dry, and harsh.

There was the father, half-buried in an immense camlet coat, which was usually brought out of his chest only on Sundays, but which he ventured to put on on so grand an occasion as the present, and of which he took more care than he did of his wife and daughter, being certain that the latter could take care of themselves.

There was the servant-maid, who did nothing but laugh. She carried an enormous basket containing everything necessary for breakfast, and even under its weight the stout lass had never ceased laughing and singing, encouraged as she was by her master, who took the burden when she was fatigued.

In those days a domestic was one of the family, and occupied a position in it very analogous to that of the house-dog, beaten sometimes, excluded never.

Gilbert contemplated by stealth this group which was so new to him. Shut up at Taverney from his birth, he had hitherto seen only the lord and the lackey; the citizen was altogether a novelty to him.

He saw these honest people employ in their domestic economy a system of philosophy, which, although not drawn from the teachings of Plato and Socrates, was modelled much after that of Bias, a little extended.

They had brought with them as much food as they possibly could, and were determined to make the most of it.

The father was carving one of those appetising pieces of roast veal, so much in vogue with the Parisian tradesmen. Nicely browned, dainty, and tempting, it reposed amidst a bed of carrots, onions, and bacon, in the dish in which the day before it had been baked, carefully placed there by the good housekeeper. The maid had then carried it to the baker, who, whilst baking his loaves, had given it an asylum in his oven along with a score of such dishes destined to assist the enjoyments of the following day.

Gilbert chose out a place for himself at the foot of a neighbouring elm, and dusted it carefully with his checked pocket-handkerchief. He then took off his hat, spread his handkerchief on the ground, and seated himself. He paid no attention to his neighbours, which they remarking, naturally directed a good deal of their own to him.

"That is a careful young man," said the mother.

The daughter blushed. She always did so when a young man was mentioned before her, a trait in her character which gave the highest gratification to her parents.

The father turned, "And a handsome lad, too," said he.

The daughter blushed still more deeply than before.

"He looks tired," said the servant-maid, "and yet he has not been carrying anything."

"Rather say lazy," said the aunt.

"Sir," said the mother, addressing Gilbert, with that familiarity which is found nowhere but among the Parisians, "are the carriages still far off?"

Gilbert turned, and seeing that these words were addressed to him, rose and bowed.

"A most polite young man," said the mother.

This remark added a still deeper dye to the daughter's cheeks.

"I do not know, madame," answered Gilbert; "I only heard that a cloud of dust was seen about a quarter of a league off."

"Draw nearer, sir," said the honest tradesman, "and if you have not breakfasted——" and he pointed to the excellent repast which was spread on the grass.

Gilbert approached the group. He had not breakfasted, and the seducing odour of the viands tempted him strongly; but he jingled his twenty-five sous in his pocket, and reflecting that for the third of this sum he could purchase a breakfast almost as good as that which was offered to him, he would not accept any favour from people whom he saw for the first time.

"Thank you, sir," said he, "a thousand thanks; but I have already breakfasted."

"Ah!" said the good woman, "I see that you are a prudent young man. But from where you are seated you will see nothing."

"Why," replied Gilbert, smiling, "in that case you will not see anything yourselves, as you are in the same position as myself."

"Oh, it is a very different matter with us! We have a nephew a sergeant in the French guards."

The young girl looked like a peony.

"His post this morning will be before Le Paon Bleu."

"If I am not taking too great a liberty," said Gilbert, "may I ask where Le Paon Bleu is?"

"Just opposite the Carmelite Convent," replied the mother. "He has promised to keep places for us behind his detachment. He will then give us his bench, and we shall see at our ease all the company get out of their carriages."

It was now Gilbert's turn to redden; he had refused to eat with the good people, but he longed to be of their party.

Nevertheless, his philosophy, or rather his pride, whispered: "It is very well for women to require some one to assist them, but I, a man, have arms and shoulders of my own."

"All those who do not get placed like us," continued the mother, as if guessing his thoughts, "will only see empty carriages—no great sight in truth, for empty carriages can be seen everywhere, and certainly not worth the trouble of coming as far as St. Denis for."

"But, madame," said Gilbert, "it seems to me that many besides yourself will endeavour to secure the place you speak of."

"Yes; but every one has not a nephew in the guards to assist them."

"Ah! true!" murmured Gilbert.

As he said this, his face wore an expression of disappointment which did not escape Parisian penetration.

"But," said the husband, well skilled in divining the wishes of his wife, "this gentleman can accompany us if he pleases."

"Oh, sir, I fear I should be troublesome," replied Gilbert.

"Bah! not at all," said the good woman; "on the contrary, you will assist us in reaching our places. We have only one man now to depend on, and then we should have two."

No other argument could have had so much weight in determining Gilbert. The idea that he could be useful, and by so doing pay for the favour which was offered him, put him quite at his ease and relieved every scruple.

He accepted the offer.

"We shall see to whom he will offer his arm," said the aunt.

This assistance was indeed a real God-send to Gilbert. How, without it, could he have passed through a barrier of thirty thousand persons, each more favoured than himself by rank, wealth, or strength, and, above all, by the practice they had acquired in obtaining places at fêtes, where every one seizes the best he can procure?

Had our philosopher been less of a theoretical and more of a practical man, the present occasion would have furnished him with an admirable opportunity for studying the dynamics of society.

The carriage with four horses burst like a cannon-ball through the mass; all fell back on each side before its running footman, with his plumed hat, his gaily striped jacket, and his thick stick, who rushed on in advance, frequently preceded by two formidable coach-dogs.

The carriage with two horses advanced more slowly, and whispered a sort of pass-word in the ear of a guardsman, after which it proceeded to take its place in the cortège before the convent.

Single horsemen, although overlooking the crowd from their elevated position, were forced to advance at a foot-pace, and only gained a good position after a thousand jostlings, interruptions, and oaths.

Lastly, the poor pedestrian, trodden, trampled on, and tossed about, was driven forward like the foam of the wave by a thousand waves rolling on behind. Sometimes raising himself on tiptoe to see over the heads of his neighbours; sometimes wrestling like Antæus, to fall like him to his mother earth; seeking his way through the multitude, and when he had found it, dragging after him his family—almost always a troop of women—whom the Parisian alone ventures to attempt conducting through such scenes.

Lowest of all, or rather, superior to all, in such circumstances, was the man of the very dregs of the people. With unshaven beard and ragged cap, his arms naked to the elbow, and his garments held together by some fragment of a cord, indefatigably working with elbows, with shoulders, and with feet, and ever and anon uttering a savage and sardonic laugh, he made his way among the crowd as easily as Gulliver amidst the Lilliputians.

Gilbert, who was neither a great lord with a carriage-and-four, nor a member of parliament with two, nor a soldier on horseback, nor a Parisian, nor a man of the people, must have infallibly been trampled under foot by the throng, had he not been under the protection of the tradesman. Backed by him he felt powerful, and boldly offered his arm to the mother of the family.

"Impertinent fellow!" said the aunt.

They set out; the father gave his sister and his daughter each an arm, and the maid-servant followed behind with the huge basket.

"Gentlemen, may I trouble you?" said the good woman, with her ready laugh. "Gentlemen, if you please, a little room. Gentlemen, be good enough——"

And every one fell back and yielded a passage to her and Gilbert, while in their wake glided the rest of the party.

Foot by foot, step by step, they managed to advance five hundred paces,

and then found themselves close to that formidable line of French guards on which the tradesman and his family rested all their hopes. The daughter had by this time regained her natural colour. Once there, the citizen mounted on Gilbert's shoulders to look over the soldiers' heads, and perceived at twenty yards' distance from him his wife's nephew twisting his moustaches. The good man made such outrageous gestures with his hat, that at last his nephew's attention was attracted to him; he came forward, asked his comrades to make way a little, and obtained a slight opening in their ranks.

Through this chink slipped Gilbert and the good woman, then the citizen himself, the sister and daughter, and after them the stout lass with the basket. Their troublesome journey was over, and mutual thanks were exchanged between Gilbert and the head of the family. The mother endeavoured to detain him by their side, the aunt said he had better go, and they separated, not to meet again.

In the open space in which Gilbert now found himself, none but privileged persons were admitted, and he therefore easily reached the trunk of a large linden-tree, mounted upon a stone near it, and, supporting himself by a low branch, waited patiently.

About half-an-hour after he had thus installed himself, the cannon roared, the rattling of the drums was heard, and the great bell of the cathedral sent forth its first majestic peal.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE KING'S CARRIAGES.

A DULL heavy sound was heard in the distance, which became stronger and deeper as it advanced. As Gilbert listened, he felt every nerve in his body vibrate painfully.

The people were shouting "God save the king!" It was the fashion then.

Onward came a cloud of prancing horses covered with housings of gold and purple; these were the musketeers, the gendarmes, and Swiss horseguards. Then followed a massive carriage magnificently decorated.

Gilbert perceived in it a blue ribbon and a majestic head not uncovered. He saw the cold penetrating light of the royal look, before which every form bent and every head was uncovered. Fascinated—motionless—breathless, he forgot to take off his hat.

A violent blow roused him from his trance; his hat rolled on the ground.

He sprang forward, lifted it up, and looking round, saw the tradesman's nephew looking at him with that truculent smile which is peculiar to the soldier.

"Well," said he, "so you don't take off your hat to the king?"

Gilbert turned pale, and looked at his hat covered with dust.

"It is the first time I ever saw the king," said he, "and I forgot to salute him, it is true. But I did not know——"

"You did not know?" said the soldier, frowning.

Gilbert feared that he should be driven from the spot where he was so well placed for seeing Andrée, and love conquered pride.

"Pardon me," said he, "I am from the country."

"And you have come to Paris to be educated, my little man?"

"Yes, sir," replied Gilbert, swallowing his rage.

"Well, since you are seeking instruction," said the sergeant, arresting Gilbert's hand as he was just going to put his hat on his head, "learn this; you must take off your hat to the dauphiness as well as to the king, and to their royal highnesses the princes as well as to the dauphiness; in short, you must take it off to all the carriages on which you see the fleur-de-lis. Do you know the fleur-de-lis, my little fellow or must I show you what it is?"

"Quite unnecessary, sir; I know it."

"It is well you know even that much," grumbled the sergeant.

The royal carriages continued to file past. As each reached the door of the convent, it stopped to permit its occupants to alight. This operation caused every five minutes a general halt along the whole line.

At one of these halts, Gilbert felt as if a fiery sword had pierced his heart. He became giddy, everything swam before his eyes, and he trembled so violently that he was forced to grasp his branch more firmly to prevent himself from falling.

About ten paces from him, in one of the carriages with the fleur-de-lis to which the sergeant had desired him to take off his hat, he had just perceived Andrée. Dressed in white, and dazzling with beauty, she seemed to his excited eyes some angelic being from a higher sphere.

He uttered a stifled cry; but immediately afterwards, conquering his agitation, he commanded his heart to be still and his gaze steady; and so great was his self-control, that he succeeded.

Andrée, on her side, wishing to know why the procession had stopped, leaned forward out of the carriage, and directing her clear and limpid gaze around, she perceived Gilbert and at once recognised him. Gilbert feared that on seeing him she would be surprised and would point him out to her father.

He was not mistaken. With an air of astonishment she turned towards the Baron de Taverney, who, decorated with his red ribbon, sat with great dignity beside her, and directed his attention to Gilbert.

"Gilbert?" cried the baron, starting, "Gilbert here? And who, pray, will take care of Mahon at Taverney?"

The young man heard these words distinctly, and with the most studied respect he bowed to Andrée and the baron. It required all his strength to accomplish this feat.

"It is really he!" continued the baron, on perceiving our philosopher. "It is the little rascal himself!"

The idea of Gilbert being in Paris was one so far removed from his thoughts, that at first he would not believe his daughter's assertions, and could hardly credit even his own eyes. As for Andrée, whom Gilbert examined closely, after the first slight shade of surprise had passed away, her countenance resumed an expression of most perfect calm.

The baron leaned out of the carriage window and signed to Gilbert to approach; but as he attempted to obey, the sergeant stopped him.

"You see that I am called," said he.

"By whom?" demanded the sergeant.

"The gentleman in that carriage."

The sergeant's eye followed the direction of Gilbert's finger, and rested on the Baron de Taverney's carriage.

"Pray allow him to come this way, sergeant," said the baron. "I wish to speak to the lad—two words only."

"Four, sir, four, if you like," replied the soldier. "You have plenty of time; they are now reading an address at the gate, and I dare say it will occupy half an hour. Pass through, young man."

"Come hither, you rascal!" said the baron to Gilbert, who affected to walk at his usual pace, "and tell me by what accident it happens you are here when you ought to be at Taverney!"

Gilbert saluted Andrée and the baron a second time and replied:

"It was no accident which brought me to Paris, sir; I came hither of my own free will."

"Your free will, you scoundrel?—Do you talk of your will to me?"

"Why not? Every free man has the right to possess it."

"Oh, ho! Free man! You imagine yourself free, do you, you little wretch?"

"Certainly I am; I have never sold my freedom to any one."

"Upon my word, this is an amusing sort of a scoundrel!" exclaimed the baron, confounded at the coolness with which Gilbert spoke. "Your free will led you to Paris!—And how did you travel, pray!—What assistance had you, may I ask?"

"I came on foot."

"On foot!" said Andrée, with a sort of pity in her tone.

"And pray what do you intend to do in Paris?" inquired the baron.

"To get educated first—then make my fortune."

"Educated?"

"Yes, I am certain of being educated."

"Make your fortune?"

"I hope to make it."

"And in the meantime what do you do? Beg?"

"Beg!" exclaimed Gilbert, with lofty scorn.

"You steal, then?"

"Sir," said Gilbert, with a look so proud and fierce that it fixed Andrée's attention on him for a moment, "sir, did I ever steal from you?"

"What can your idle hands do but steal?"

"What those of a man of genius do—a man whom I wish to imitate, were it only in his perseverance," replied Gilbert. "They copy music."

Andrée turned towards him; "Copy music?" said she.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"You know music, then?" inquired she, with the same contemptuous tone in which she would have said, "It is false."

"I know my notes, and that is enough for a copyist."

"And how the devil did you learn your notes, you rascal?" cried the baron.

"Yes, how?" added Andrée, smiling.

"I love music, sir, passionately, and when Mademoiselle Andrée played on the harpsichord every day, I hid myself that I might listen."

"Good-for-nothing fellow!"

"At first I remembered the airs; then, as they were written in a music-book, by degrees I learned to read the notes from the book."

"From my music-book?" exclaimed Andrée, with the utmost indignation; "did you dare to touch my music-book?"

"No, mademoiselle, I did not permit myself to do so; but as it remained open on the harpsichord, sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, I endeavoured to read in it, but without touching it. My eyes would not soil the pages."

"You will see," cried the baron, "that the fellow will assert next that he plays on the piano like Haydn!"

"I should probably have been able by this time to play," said Gilbert, "had I dared to place my fingers on the keys."

Andrée again glanced at that face which was animated by a sentiment only to be compared to the fanaticism of a martyr eager for the stake; but the baron, who did not possess his daughter's clear and comprehensive intellect, felt his choler rise on reflecting that the young man was in the right, and that he had been treated inhumanly in being left with Mahon at Taverney. It is not easy to pardon in an inferior the wrong which he proves you have done him, and the baron therefore became more furious in proportion as his daughter became calm.

"Wretch!" cried he, "you steal away; you go running about like a vagabond, and when questioned about your mode of life, you utter such a tissue of absurdities as those which we have just heard! But it shall not be my fault if rogues and pickpockets infest the king's highways."

Andrée by a gesture entreated her father to be calm; she felt that ungoverned anger destroys all superiority in the person giving way to it. But the baron thrust aside her hand, which she had placed on his arm, and continued: "I shall recommend you to the notice of the Count de Sartines, and you shall speedily take a turn in the Bicetre. you scarecrow of a philosopher."

Gilbert stepped back, crushed his hat under his arm, and, pale with anger, exclaimed:

"Learn, my lord baron, that since I arrived in Paris I have found protectors in whose ante-chambers your Count de Sartines would be glad to wait."

"Indeed?" said the baron. "In that case I shall take care, if you escape a prison, that you do not escape a good caning—Andrée, call your brother!"

Andrée leaned forward out of the carriage and said in a low voice to Gilbert,—"Take my advice, M. Gilbert, and retire."

"Philip, Philip!" shouted the old man.

"Leave us!" said Andrée again to the young man, who remained silent and motionless in his place, as if in ecstatic contemplation.

An officer, summoned by the baron's cries, hurried forward to the carriage door; it was Philip, dressed in his captain's uniform. The young man was splendidly attired, and seemed in high spirits.

"How! Gilbert?" he exclaimed with a good-humoured smile on recognising the young man, "Gilbert here! How do you do, Gilbert? Well, what do you want with me, my dear father?"

"How do you do, M. Philip?" replied Gilbert.

"What do I want?" said the baron furiously. "I want you to take the sheath of your sword and chastise this scoundrel!"

"But what has he done?" asked Philip, gazing by turns, with increasing astonishment, at the angry face of his father and the rigid and motionless features of Gilbert.

"Done? he—he—has—beat him, Philip,—beat him like a dog!" cried the baron. Taverney turned to his sister.

"What has he done, Andrée? has he insulted you?"

"Insulted her!" repeated Gilbert.

"No, Philip, no!" replied Andrée, "he has done nothing wrong; my father is in error. Gilbert is no longer in our service, and has a perfect right to go where he pleases; but my father will not understand this, and is angry at finding him here."

"Is that all?" said Philip.

"Nothing more, brother; and I cannot imagine why my father should be so angry, particularly on such a subject, and about things and persons that do not deserve even a thought. Philip, look whether the train is moving on."

The baron was silent, overcome by the lofty serenity of his daughter. Gilbert's heart sank in his breast, crushed and withered under her contempt. For a moment a feeling akin to hatred darted through his heart. He would have preferred the mortal thrust of Philip's sword—ay, even a lash of his whip, to her insulting scorn.

He was almost fainting; fortunately the address had now ended, and the cortége once more moved on. The baron's carriage advanced with the rest, and Andrée disappeared from before his eyes like a vision. Gilbert remained alone—he could have wept—he could have groaned aloud—he thought that he could no longer bear the weight of his sufferings.

Just then a hand rested on his shoulder. He turned and saw Philip, who, having given his horse to a soldier of his regiment to hold, returned smiling towards him.

"Come, let me hear what has happened, my poor Gilbert," said he, "and why you have come to Paris."

His frank and cordial tone touched the young man's heart.

"Oh, sir," replied he, with a sigh, his stern stoicism melting at once, "what would I have done at Taverney, I ask you? I must have died of despair, ignorance, and hunger."

Philip started; his generous heart was struck, as Andrée's had been, by the misery and destitution in which Gilbert had been left.

"And you think, my poor fellow, to succeed in Paris without money, protectors, or resources?"

"I trust so, sir. A man who is willing to work rarely dies of hunger, where there are other men who wish to do nothing."

Philip was struck by this reply; until then he had always looked on Gilbert as a commonplace domestic.

"But have you any means of buying food?" said he.

"I can earn my daily bread, M. Philip. That is sufficient for one who has never had any cause for self-reproach, but that of having eaten bread not gained by his toil."

"I hope you do not say so with reference to that which you received at Taverney, my poor lad. Your father and mother were faithful servants, and you were always willing to make yourself useful."

"I only did my duty, sir."

"Listen to me, Gilbert. You are aware that I always liked you. I have always looked upon you in a more favourable light than others, whether justly or the reverse the future will show. What others called haughty pride, I termed delicacy; where others saw rudeness and ill-breeding, I perceived only honest bluntness."

"Ah, chevalier!" said Gilbert, breathing more freely.

"I really wish you well, Gilbert."

"Thank you, sir."

"Young like you, and like you also in an unhappy position, I was perhaps on that account more disposed to feel for and pity you. Fortune has blessed me with abundance; let me assist you until fortune smiles on you in your turn."

"Thanks, sir, many thanks."

"What do you think of doing? You are too proud to accept of a situation as servant."

Gilbert shook his head with a scornful smile. "I wish to study," said he.

"But in order to study you must have masters, and to pay them you must have money."

"I can earn money, sir."

"Earn money? How much can you earn?"

"Twenty-five sous a day, and in a short time perhaps thirty and even forty sous."

"But that is barely enough for food."

Gilbert smiled.

"Perhaps," continued Philip, "I am not taking the right way of offering you my services."

"Your services to me, M. Philip!"

"Yes, my services. Are you ashamed to accept them?"

Gilbert made no answer.

"Men are sent on earth to aid one another," continued Maison-Rouge. "Are we not all brethren?"

Gilbert raised his head and fixed his intelligent gaze on the chevalier's noble countenance.

"Does this language surprise you?" said he.

"No, sir," said Gilbert, "it is the language of philosophy; but it is not usual to hear such from persons of your rank."

"Yet it is the language of the times. The dauphin himself shares in these sentiments. Come, do not be proud with me," continued Philip. "What I lend you, you can repay me one day or other. Who knows but you may yet be a Colbert or a Vauban?"

"Or a Tronchin," said Gilbert.

"Yes, or a Tronchin. Here is my purse, let me share its contents with you."

"Thank you, sir," said the indomitable Gilbert, moved in spite of himself by Philip's genial kindness; "but I do not want anything—only—only—believe me, I am as grateful to you as if I had accepted your offer."

And, bowing, he disappeared in the crowd, leaving the young captain lost in astonishment. The latter waited a few minutes, as if he could not believe his eyes or ears, but finding that Gilbert did not return, he mounted his horse and returned to his post.

CHAPTER L.

THE DEMONIAC.

THE noise of the carriages, the prolonged and merry peal of the bells, the joyful beating of the drums, all the pomp and ceremony of the day—a faint reflection of that world, now lost to her for ever—faded from the Princess Louise's mind like an idle wave which had rolled up to the walls of her cell and then retreated.

When the king had departed, after having once more endeavoured, but in vain, to win his daughter back to the world by a mixture of paternal entreaty and royal command, and when the dauphiness, who had been at the first glance struck by the real greatness of soul displayed by her august aunt, had also disappeared with her gay throng of courtiers, the superior of the Carmelites gave orders that the hangings should be taken down,

the flowers removed, and the lace with which the convent had been decorated once more placed in its usual repository.

Of all the sisterhood of the Carmelites she alone was unmoved when the massive gates of the convent, which had for a moment opened to the world, closed heavily again on their solitude.

Then she summoned the sister who acted as treasurer of the convent.

"During these two noisy and bustling days," asked she, "have the poor received their usual alms?"

"Yes, madame."

"Have the sick been visited?"

"Yes, madame."

"Did the soldiers receive some refreshment before they departed."

"They received the wine and the bread which you ordered, madame."

"Then no one is ill or sick in the convent?"

"No one, madame."

The princess approached a window and softly inhaled the cool and perfumed breeze which was wafted towards her on the humid wings of evening. The treasurer waited respectfully until her august superior should give her an order or dismiss her. Madame Louise commenced to pluck off the leaves of the roses and jessamine which twined around the windows and climbed up the walls of the building. Heaven alone knows what were the thoughts of the poor royal recluse at that moment.

Suddenly the door of a detached building in the courtyard, close at hand, was shaken by the violent kick of a horse. Madame Louise started.

"What nobleman of the court has remained after the rest at St. Denis?" asked she.

"His Eminence the Cardinal de Rohan, madame."

"Are his horses here, too?"

"No, madame; they are at the chapter-house of the abbey, where he is to pass the night."

"What noise was that, then?"

"Madame, it was caused by the foreign woman's horse."

"What woman?" asked Madame Louise, endeavouring to recollect.

"The Italian who came yesterday to request the protection of your royal highness."

"Ah! true, I remember now. Where is she?"

"In her chamber, or in the church."

"How has she conducted herself since she came?"

"Since yesterday she has refused all nourishment except dry bread, and has spent the entire night praying in the chapel."

"Some great criminal, doubtless?" said the superior, frowning.

"I do not know, madame; she has spoken to no one since she arrived."

"What sort of a woman is she?"

"Extremely handsome, and with an expression at once gentle and haughty."

"This morning, during the ceremony, where was she?"

"In her chamber, close to the window, where I saw her, half hidden by the curtain, watching with anxious eyes every person who entered, as if in each she feared an enemy."

"She is some poor erring creature of the world in which I once lived and reigned. Admit her."

The nun made a movement to retire.

"Ah! By-the-bye, what is her name?" asked the princess.

"Lorenza Feliciani."

"I know no one of that name," said Madame Louise, reflecting; "no matter, introduce her."

The superior seated herself in her chair of state, which was of carved oak, made in the reign of Henry II., and had been used by the last nine abbesses of the Carmelites. It was a formidable judgment-seat, before which had trembled many a poor novice caught on the slippery path between spiritual and temporal things.

A moment afterwards the nun entered, leading in the strange lady, who was covered from head to foot with the long veil we have before mentioned.

The Princess Louise possessed the piercing eye peculiar to her family, and as Lorenza Feliciani appeared before her, she fastened a stern and searching glance on her. But she saw in the young woman's demeanour so much humility, grace, and beauty, and in the large eyes, filled with tears, which she turned on her, such an innocent and supplicating expression, that her feeling of harshness gave place immediately to one of compassion and kindness.

"Draw near, madame," said the princess.

The stranger advanced hesitatingly, and was about to kneel, when the princess prevented her.

"Is not your name, madame," said she, "Lorenza Feliciani?"

"Yes, madame."

"And you wish to confide a secret to me?"

"Oh! I burn to do so."

"But why had you not recourse to the tribunal of penance? I have only power to console; a priest can not only console, but pardon."

"I require only consolation, madame," replied Lorenza; "and, besides, it is to a woman alone that I dare relate what I have to tell you."

"Then it is a strange story which you are about to narrate?"

"Yes, strange indeed. But hear me patiently, madame; it is to you alone, I repeat, that I dare confide it, both because you are a woman, and because you are all-powerful to protect me."

"Protect you? Are you pursued, then? Are you in danger?"

"Oh, yes, madame, yes!" cried the stranger, with wild alarm.

"But reflect, madame," said the princess, "that this is a convent, and not a fortress; that those worldly thoughts which agitate the breasts of men penetrate not here; that strife and combat are here extinguished; that this is not a house of justice, of force, or repression, but simply the house of God."

"Oh! that is what I seek!" said Lorenza. "Yes, I seek the house of God, for there alone can I find shelter and repose."

"But God admits not of revenge. How then do you ask his servant to avenge you? Address yourself to the magistrates."

"They can do nothing against him whom I dread."

"Who is he, then?" asked the abbess, with a mysterious and involuntary dread.

Lorenza approached close to the princess in a nervous and excited manner.

"Who is he, madame?" said she. "He is, I firmly believe, one of those demons who war against man, and whom Satan, their prince, has gifted with superhuman power."

"How? what mean you?" exclaimed the princess, recoiling as if to satisfy herself that she was not addressing a lunatic.

"And I—I—wretch that I am!" continued Lorenza, writhing her snow-white and rounded arms, which seemed modelled from those of some antique statue, "I crossed the path of that man—and now—I am—I am——"

"What? What?"

Lorenza again approached the princess, and, as if terrified herself at what she was about to utter, she whispered hoarsely, "I am possessed by the demon!"

"Possessed?" cried the princess. "Take care, madame! Are you sure you are in your senses? Are you not——"

"Mad—you would say—no, no, I am not mad—but I may become so if you abandon me."

"But, madame," said the princess, recovering her firmness, "permit me to observe that you seem to me in all respects one of the favoured of heaven; you are rich and beautiful, you express yourself rationally, and I see in your countenance nothing betokening that terrible and mysterious disease called possession."

"Madame, it is in my life, it is in the adventures which have befallen me, that the baleful secret lies which I would willingly conceal even from myself."

"Explain yourself calmly. Am I the first to whom you have disclosed your sufferings? Your parents, your friends——"

"My parents!" exclaimed the young woman, clasping her hands with agony, "my poor parents! Shall I never see you again? Friends?" added she, bitterly, "alas, madame, have I any friends?"

"Come, let us proceed regularly, my poor child," said Madame Louise, endeavouring to restore order to the stranger's incoherent words; "tell me all. Who are your parents? How came you to abandon them?"

"Madame, I am a native of Rome, and I lived in Rome with them. My father belongs to the ancient nobility, but, like all our patricians, he is poor. I have also a mother, and a brother older than myself. In France, I believe, when a family such as mine has a son and daughter, the portion of the daughter is sacrificed to purchase the son's sword; with us the daughter is sacrificed to put the son forward in the church. Consequently I received no education, as all our patrimony was required to pay for my brother's education, that, as my poor brother innocently said, he might one day be a cardinal; and for this purpose my parents submitted to every privation, and decided on making me take the veil in the Carmelite Convent at Subiaco."

"And you—what did you say?"

"Nothing, madame. From childhood I had been taught to look forward to such an event as inevitable. Besides, I was not consulted; my parents commanded—I had only to obey."

"But yet——"

"Oh! madame, we Roman girls are helpless instruments in the hands of others. Almost all my young friends, who had brothers, had paid this debt for the advancement of their families. I had therefore no reason to complain; all that was done was in the ordinary course of things. My mother merely caressed me a little more than usual as the time for my leaving her approached. At last the day for the commencement of my noviciate arrived; my father prepared his five hundred crowns, my dowry for the convent, and we set out for Subiaco. It is only about nine leagues from Rome to Subiaco, but the roads are bad, and our journey was slow and fatiguing. Nevertheless, it pleased me. I welcomed it as a last enjoyment, and whispered adieu to the trees, the shrubs, the rocks, and even

to the withered grass which lined the road. How could I tell if at the convent I should see trees, rocks, or shrubs? Suddenly, in the midst of my fancies, as we wound along between a wood and a mass of overhanging rock, the carriage stopped. My mother shrieked—my father seized his pistols. My thoughts descended suddenly to earth, for those who had stopped us were bandits."

"My poor child!" said the princess, becoming more and more interested in the narrative.

"Well—shall I confess it, madame?—I was not much terrified, for these men had stopped us to take our money, and this money was the sum destined for my dowry to the convent. Consequently, if there was no dowry, my entrance into the convent would be delayed until my father could collect five hundred crowns more, and I knew well the time and trouble it had taken to amass these. But when the robbers, after having shared the booty, instead of permitting us to continue our journey, turned and seized me, regardless of the tears of my mother and the efforts of my father to defend me, I was struck with a sort of nameless terror, and shrieked aloud. They bound my hands, in spite of my struggles, and held me there whilst they threw the dice to ascertain to whom I should belong. I had abandoned all hope; my mother had fainted away, and my father lay writhing on the earth. At this moment a man mounted on horseback appeared among the robbers. He had spoken in a low voice to one of the sentinels on passing him, and the man had allowed him to proceed, exchanging a sign with him as he did so. He was of the middle height, of commanding features, and with a fixed and resolute glance; he continued to advance calmly at the usual pace of his steed, and when he had arrived opposite me he stopped. The bandit who was holding me bound, turned suddenly at the first blast which the stranger gave on a little whistle fixed to the end of his whip, and allowed me to slip from his hands. 'Come hither,' said the unknown; and, as the man appeared to hesitate, he leaned forward and whispered in his ear the single word "*Mac.*" "*Benac,*" replied the bandit; and then, like a lion subdued and crouching under the lash, he proceeded to untie my hands, as well as those of my father and mother. Then, as the money had been already divided, each man of the troop came forward in his turn to lay his share on a stone. Not a crown of the entire sum was wanting. 'Now, go!' said he to the banditti, and instantly every man disappeared among the surrounding woods.

"'Lorenzo Feliciani,' said the stranger then, addressing me and fixing on me a look which had more than human power in it, 'proceed on your way; you are free!' My father and mother thanked this stranger, who knew me, but whom we did not know, and entered the carriage again. I accompanied them with a sort of regret; for some strange, irresistible power seemed to attract me to the man who had thus saved me. He remained immovable in the same spot, as if to protect our retreat, and as long as I could distinguish his form my eyes were fixed on him, and it was only when he was lost to view that the oppressive feeling which weighed upon my bosom was removed."

"But who was this extraordinary man?" asked the princess, interested by the simplicity of the narrative.

"Deign to hear me farther, madame," said Lorenza. "Alas! all is not yet told."

"I listen," said Madame Louise.

The young woman proceeded:

"Two hours afterwards we reached Subiaco. During the rest of our

journey we never ceased conversing about this mysterious protector, who had come so suddenly, like an angelic messenger, to our assistance, and whose power seemed so inexplicable and unbounded. My father, less credulous than I, thought that he must be the captain of one of the numerous troops of robbers which infest the neighbourhood of Rome; but in this I could not agree, although I dared not openly oppose my opinion to my father's, which was the result of years and experience. My instinctive feeling of gratitude towards this man who had so wonderfully saved me revolted against the idea that he was a bandit; and every evening, in my devotions, I offered up a prayer to the Virgin for my unknown protector.

"The same day I entered the convent. I felt sadder, but also more resigned. An Italian, and consequently superstitious, I believed that God, by delivering me from the bandits, had wished to preserve me pure and unsullied for his service. I therefore gave myself up with ardour to the fulfilment of every duty of religion; and my father, learning this, drew up a petition to the Sovereign Pontiff to entreat him to shorten the period of my noviciate. I signed this document, which was expressed in terms so warm and earnest, that his Holiness, seeing in it only the aspirations of a soul disgusted with the world, granted me a dispensation which fixed the term of my noviciate at a month instead of a year.

"This news, when announced to me, inspired me with neither joy nor grief. I was like one already dead to the world. For fifteen days I was kept closely confined, lest any worldly desires might arise in my breast. At the end of that time I was allowed to descend with the other sisters to the chapel. I entered and took my place behind the curtain which separated, or affected to separate, the nuns from the congregation. Looking through one of the openings, which seemed to me, as it were, a loophole from which I could obtain a last glance at the world I was leaving, I saw a man standing up alone in the middle of the kneeling crowd. He seemed to devour me with his eyes, and I felt again that strange sensation of uneasiness which I had before experienced, and which seemed to draw me, as it were, away from myself, as I had seen my brother draw a needle after the loadstone, even through a leaf of paper or a piece of wood.

"Overcome, subdued, without force to struggle against my feelings, I leaned forward, and with clasped hands, I murmured, 'Thanks, thanks!' The nuns looked at me with surprise. They could not comprehend my words or gestures, and, following my glance, they rose on their seats, and gazed down into the body of the church. I also gazed, trembling. The stranger had disappeared. They questioned me, but I only turned pale and red by turns, and stammered out some incoherent words. From that moment, madame," cried Lorenza, in a despairing voice, "the demon possessed me!"

"Nevertheless," replied the princess, smiling, "I see nothing supernatural in all that you have related. Calm yourself, my sister, and proceed."

"Ah, madame! it is because you cannot understand what I felt. Heart, soul, mind—the demon possessed all!"

"My sister, I fear greatly that this demon was only love," said Madame Louise.

"Oh, love could not have made me suffer thus! Love would not so have oppressed my heart—it would not have shaken my frame as the storm shakes a slender reed! Love would not have whispered in my ear the sinful thought which haunted me at that moment."

"What thought, my child?"

"Ought not I to have disclosed all to my confessor, madame?"

"Doubtless."

"Well, the demon that possessed me whispered me, on the contrary, to keep it secret. I feared what he would think of me."

"An evil thought, indeed; but it is often a very innocent demon which puts such thoughts in the heart of a woman.—Proceed."

"On the following day I was summoned to the parlour. I found there one of my neighbours of the Via Frattina at Rome, a young married lady, who regretted very much the loss of my society, because every evening we used to meet to talk and sing together. Behind her, close to the door, stood a man wrapped in a cloak, who seemed her servant. He did not turn towards me, but I turned towards him; he did not speak, yet I knew him. He was my unknown protector. The same thrilling sensation I had already experienced shot through my frame. I felt my whole being subdued by the power of this man. Had it not been for the bars which held me captive, I should certainly have followed him. Although enveloped closely in his mantle, rays of light seemed to shoot from him which dazzled me; profound as was his silence, it had sounds which spoke to me a harmonious language. I made a violent effort to subdue my feelings, and asked my friend who the man was who accompanied her. She did not know him. Her husband, who had purposed accompanying her, had been prevented by some engagement, and had brought this friend of his, a stranger to her, to be her companion.

"My friend was religious, and, seeing in a corner of the parlour a Madonna who had the reputation of possessing miraculous powers, she would not depart without offering up a prayer before her. Whilst she was engaged in her devotions, the man entered the room, approached close to me, uncovered his face, and fixed his glowing eyes on mine. I waited for him to speak—my bosom heaved as if in expectation of his words, but he contented himself with putting his arms through the bars which separated us, and extended them above my head. Immediately an inexpressible feeling of delight seized on my whole frame. He smiled; I returned his smile, closing my eyes, which seemed weighed down by an overpowering languor, as I did so. Then, as if he had merely wished to assure himself of his power over me, he immediately retired. As he disappeared I recovered by degrees the use of my senses; but I was still under the dominion of this strange hallucination, when my friend, having finished her prayer, rose, and, embracing me, took her leave. When I was undressing at night, I found in my bosom a note containing these words: 'In Rome, the man who loves a nun is punished by death. Will you kill him to whom you owe your life?' From that moment the demon possessed me entirely, for I lied before heaven, madame, in not confessing that I thought of this man much more than of my salvation."

Lorenza, terrified at what she had disclosed, paused to discover what impression it had produced on the mild and intelligent countenance of the princess.

"Still," replied the princess, firmly, "all this is not possession by the evil one; it is merely the result of an unhappy passion, and I must again repeat that such thoughts cannot be spoken of here, except to express regret for them."

"Regret? madame," cried Lorenza. "What! you behold me in tears at your feet, beseeching you to rescue me from the power of this fearful man, and yet you doubt my regret? Oh! I feel more than regret—I feel remorse."

"And yet," said Madame Louise, "up to this point——"

"Ah, madame, you have not yet heard all. Wait till I have finished, and then, I beseech you, judge me mercifully. Three days in the week we attended divine service in the chapel. The unknown was always present. I wished to resist him—I pretended that I was ill—I resolved not to go down. Alas for human weakness!—When the hour arrived, I descended with the nuns, as it were in despite of my own will. If he were not in the church when I entered, I had some moments of calm; but, as he drew near, I felt him coming. I could have said, 'Now he is a hundred paces off; now he is at the door; now he is in the church,' and that without even looking in the direction by which he came. Then, when he had reached his accustomed place, although my eyes had been fastened on my prayer-book, while I murmured the words before me, they turned involuntarily and rested on him. I could neither read nor pray; my whole looks —my whole thoughts—my whole being—were engrossed by this man. At first I could not look at him without fear; then I longed to see him; then my thoughts seemed to meet his; and often I saw him as in a dream in the night, and felt him pass beneath my window.

"The state of my mind did not escape the notice of my companions. The abbess was informed of it, and she in turn informed my parents. Three days before I was to pronounce my vows, my father, my mother, and my brother—the only relations I had in the world—entered my cell. They came ostensibly to bid me farewell, but I saw plainly that they had some other motive, and when my mother was left alone with me, she questioned me closely. And here the power of the evil one may clearly be seen: for instead of telling all, as I ought to have done, I denied everything obstinately.

"On the day when I was to take the veil, a strange struggle took place within me. I both dreaded and wished for the moment which was to give me up entirely to the service of God; and I felt that if the demon meditated a last effort to subdue me to his will, it would be at this solemn moment that he would attempt its execution."

"And had that strange man never written to you since the first letter which you found in your bosom?" asked the princess.

"Never, madame."

"And at that time you had never spoken to him?"

"Never, except in thought."

"Nor written to him?"

"Oh, never!"

"Proceed; you were at the day when you were to take the veil."

"That day, as I have told your highness, I hoped was to end my tortures, and I was impatient for the ceremony. 'When I belong to God entirely,' I thought, 'He will defend me against the demon who now wrestles with me for the possession of my soul.' In the meantime the hour arrived. I descended to the church, pale, restless, but yet less agitated than usual. My father, my mother, my brother, my friend from the Via Frattina who had come before to see me, and many other of our friends, were there. The inhabitants of the neighbouring villages also thronged the church, for the report had been spread that I was lovely, and a lovely victim, they say, is most acceptable to the Lord.

"The service began. I would have hastened it by my prayers; for he was not present, and in his absence I felt that I was mistress of myself. Already the priest had raised the crucifix before me, and I was just about to extend my arm towards it, when the trembling which invariably

announced the approach of my persecutor seized me. Forced by an irresistible attraction, I turned round and saw him standing near the pulpit, gazing at me more fixedly than he had ever yet done. In vain I endeavoured to keep my eyes on the priest—service, ceremony, prayers, faded from my sight. I believe I was questioned concerning the rite; I remember I was pulled by the arm to arouse me, but I tottered like some inanimate object trembling on its base. I was shown the scissors, from which a ray of sunlight was reflected back with dazzling brightness, but I did not even wink. Then I felt the cold steel on my neck, and heard its sharp point in my hair.

"From that moment it seemed to me as if all strength left me; my soul rushed from my body to meet his, and I fell motionless on the pavement; yet, strange to say, not like one who had fainted, but like one overcome by sleep. I heard a loud murmur, and almost immediately after became insensible. The ceremony was interrupted with frightful tumult."

The princess clasped her hands with a gesture of compassion.

"Ah, madame, was not that terrible?" said Lorenza; "and is it not easy to see in such an event the intervention of the Enemy of man?"

"Take care, my poor girl," said the princess, in a tone of tenderness and pity; "I think you are too much disposed to attribute to miraculous power that which is simply the result of human weakness. On seeing that man you fainted, that is all. Proceed."

"Oh, madame, do not say so, or, at least, wait till you have heard all before you judge. Had I fainted, should I not have come to myself in ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, or an hour at most? Should I not have been surrounded by my sister nuns, and have resumed courage and faith on seeing them?"

"Doubtless," said Madame Louise. "Well, was it not so?"

"Madame," said Lorenza, in a low, hurrid whisper, "when I was restored to consciousness it was night. I felt a rapid, jolting motion, which fatigued me, and I raised my head, thinking that I was under the vaulted roof of the chapel, or within the curtains of my cell. I saw rocks, trees, clouds; then I felt a warm breath fanning my cheeks. I thought that it was the sick nurse who was endeavouring to restore me, and I made an effort to thank her. Madame, my head was resting on the bosom of a man—that man my persecutor! I felt myself to ascertain whether I was really alive, or if I was awake. I could not restrain a cry of terror. I was dressed in white, and wore on my head a crown of white roses like a bride, or like a maiden dressed for the tomb."

The princess uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Lorenza hid her face in her hands.

"The next day," continued Lorenza, sobbing, "I made inquiries, and ascertained that it was Wednesday. For three days, therefore, I had remained insensible. I am ignorant of all that happened during that time."

CHAPTER LI.

THE COUNT DE FENIX.

A LONG and painful silence succeeded to this narrative, during which each of the two ladies seemed absorbed in her reflections. The princess was the first to break it.

"And you lent no assistance to this man to carry you off?" said she.

"None, madame."

"You are ignorant how you left the convent?"

"I am quite ignorant."

"Yet a convent is kept carefully guarded; there are bars to the windows; the walls are very high; there is a portress who keeps the keys of the gates always at her side. That is especially the case in Italy, where the rules are even more severe than in France."

"Madame, I can only reply, that from the moment of my awaking from my trance until now, I have searched my memory to discover any trace of what must have occurred; but in vain."

"But did you not reproach him for what he had done?"

"Oh yes, madame!"

"What was his excuse?"

"That he loved me."

"And what did you reply to that?"

"That I had a horror of him."

"Then you did not love him?"

"Oh no, no!"

"Are you quite certain?"

"Alas, madame, what I felt for that man was singular indeed! When he was present I was no longer myself; what he willed, I willed; what he commanded, I did; my soul had no power, my mind no will; a look from him subdued and fascinated me. Sometimes he seemed to inspire me with thoughts which were not mine; sometimes he seemed to draw from me ideas so deeply hidden that I had never even guessed that I possessed them. Oh! do you not see, madame, that there was magic in all this?"

"It is certainly strange, if not supernatural," said the princess. "But after you had been carried off, how did you live with that man?"

"He displayed the warmest affection for me, the sincerest attachment."

"He was a vicious man, no doubt?"

"I do not think he was, madame; there was, on the contrary, something lofty and inspired in his manner of speaking."

"Come, come! you loved him; confess it!"

"No, no, madame," said the young woman, with mournful bitterness; "no, I did not love him."

"Then you ought to have left him: you ought to have appealed to the public authorities, and demanded to be restored to your parents."

"Madame, he watched me so closely that I could not fly."

"But why not write, then?"

"Wherever we stopped on the road, the house seemed to belong to him alone, and every one obeyed him. Several times I asked for pen, ink, and paper, but those to whom I applied were doubtless desired by him not to obey me, for they never even answered me."

"And how did you travel?"

"At first in a post-chaise; but at Milan, instead of a carriage we entered a kind of moving house, in which we continued our journey."

"But he must have sometimes left you alone?"

"Yes; but at these times, before leaving me, he approached me and said, 'Sleep!' I slept, and did not awake until his return."

The princess shook her head incredulously.

"You would have been able to escape," said she, "had you endeavoured to do so with energy."

"Alas! madame, and yet it seemed to me as if I did; but perhaps I was fascinated."

"Yes; fascinated by words of love, and by his caresses."

"He seldom spoke of love, madame, and except a kiss imprinted on my forehead in the morning and one in the evening, he bestowed no caresses on me."

"Strange, strange indeed!" murmured the princess; then, as if some suspicion had crossed her mind, she said aloud: "And you are ready to assert again that you do not love him?"

"I do assert it again, madame."

"And no earthly bond unites you to him?"

"None, madame."

"Then should he claim you, he would have no right over you?"

"None, madame, none."

"But," added the princess, after a moment's reflection, "how did you escape at last? I do not understand that."

"Madame, I took advantage of a violent storm which occurred whilst we were near a town called Nancy, I think. He left the part of the carriage in which I was, to go into another compartment of it, to talk to an old man who was with us. Then I leaped on his horse and fled."

"And why did you prefer remaining in France to returning to Italy?"

"I reflected that I could not return to Rome, since my parents and friends there would certainly imagine I had been the accomplice of that man, and perhaps refuse to receive me. I resolved therefore to come to Paris, and to endeavour to remain concealed; or to try and reach some other great city, where no eye—and, above all, his—could discover me. When I reached Paris, madame, every one was speaking of your retirement into the Convent of the Carmelites. They lauded your piety, your charity towards the wretched, your pity for the afflicted. A ray of hope darted through my soul, and I was struck with the conviction that you would be generous enough to receive me, and powerful enough to protect me."

"You appeal always to my power, my poor child. Is he, then, so powerful?"

"Oh, yes, madame!"

"But who is he, then? Through delicacy I have until now refrained from asking his name; but if I am to defend you, I must know against whom."

"Oh, madame, even on that point I cannot enlighten you. I know neither who he is nor what he is. All that I know is, that a king could not inspire more respect, a deity could not receive greater adoration, than he, from those to whom he deigns to reveal himself."

"But how do they address him? What is his name?"

"I have heard him addressed by different names; at present, however, I remember only two of them. One is given him by the old man, who, as I told you, travelled with us from Milan; the other he gives himself."

"What does the old man call him?"

"Acharat—is not that a heathenish name, madame?"

"And what is his other name?"

"Joseph Balsamo."

"And what can you tell me of him?"

"That he seems to know all persons, to penetrate into all things; he is cotemporary with all times, has lived in all ages. He speaks—may heaven pardon such blasphemies!—he speaks of Alexander, Cæsar, and Charlemagne, as if he had known them, yet I am sure they have been dead a very long time. But what is worse, he will talk of Caiaphas, Pilate, and our blessed Saviour, as if he had been present at the crucifixion."

"He is some charlatan, I perceive," said the princess.

"I do not know exactly what that means, madame; but what I do know is, that he is a dangerous, terrible man. All yield to him, all bend before him, all fall prostrate at his word. You think him defenceless, he is armed; you think him alone, and he causes men to rise out of the earth; and that without an effort; by a gesture, a word, a smile."

"It is well," said the princess. "Whoever he be, take courage, my child, you shall be protected from him."

"By you, madame, by you?"

"Yes, by me; so long as you yourself do not abandon my protection. But cease from this time to believe, and above all cease to endeavour to make me believe, in the superstitious visions which are the offspring of your diseased imagination. The walls of St. Denis will guard you securely against infernal powers, and against powers even more to be feared, those of wicked men. And now, madame, what are your intentions?"

"With these jewels, which belong to me, madame, I wish to pay my dowry to some convent—to this convent, if possible."

And Lorenza laid on a table precious bracelets, valuable rings, a magnificent diamond and other jewels, the whole worth about twenty thousand crowns.

"Are those ornaments your own?" asked the princess.

"Yes, madame. He gave them to me, and I devote them to the church. I have only one wish with regard to his property."

"What is that?"

"That his Arabian horse, Djerid, the instrument of my deliverance, be restored to him if he demand it."

"But with regard to yourself, you will on no account return to him?"

"On no account."

"Then what will you do? Am I to assume that it is your wish to enter this convent and continue in the practice of those duties which were interrupted at Subiaco by the extraordinary circumstances you have related to me."

"It is my dearest wish, madame; at your feet I supplicate its fulfilment."

"Be tranquil, my child; from this day you shall live with us; and when, by the exemplary conduct which I expect from you, you have shown that you deserve that favour, you shall take the vows, and I answer for it, no one shall carry you away from St. Denis whilst your abbess watches over you."

Lorenza threw herself at the feet of her benefactress, and poured forth expressions of gratitude the most tender and the most sincere; but all at once, rising on one knee, she listened, turned pale, and trembled.

"Oh, heavens! Oh, heavens!" she exclaimed.

"What is the matter?" asked Madame Louise.

"My whole frame trembles. He is coming! He is coming!"

"Who is coming?"

"He who has sworn to destroy my soul."

"That man?"

"Yes, that man—do you not see how my hand trembles. Oh!" continued she, in a tone of anguish, "he approaches!—he is near!"

"You are mistaken."

"No, madame, no! Hold me! He draws me to him against my will. Hold me! Hold me!"

Madame Louise seized her by the arm.

"Courage! courage! my poor child," said she; "were it even he, you are in safety here."

"He approaches! He approaches!" cried Lorenza, with despair and horror in her voice, her eyes fixed, and her arms extended towards the door of the room.

"This is madness. Dare any one, think you, enter unannounced the apartment of Madame Louise of France? To obtain admittance, he must be the bearer of an order from the king."

"Oh, madame, I know not how he procured an entrance," cried Lorenza, recoiling with terror; "but I do know that he is ascending the stairs—that he is scarcely ten paces distant—that he is here."

At that moment the door opened. Alarmed at such a strange coincidence, the princess could not prevent herself from starting back. A nun appeared.

"Who is there?" asked the abbess, hurriedly, "and what do you want?"

"Madame, a gentleman has just arrived who wishes to speak to your royal highness."

"His name?"

"The Count de Fenix."

"Is that he?" asked the princess, turning to Lorenza, "and do you know that name?"

"I do not know that name—but it is he, madame—it is he!"

"What does this gentleman want?" inquired the princess, addressing the nun.

"Having been sent on a mission to the King of France by his majesty the King of Prussia, he wishes, he says, to have the honour of a moment's conversation with your royal highness."

The princess reflected for a moment; then, turning to Lorenza, "Retire into that cabinet," said she. Lorenza obeyed. "And you, sister," continued the princess, "admit this gentleman." The nun curtseyed low and left the room.

Having ascertained that the door of the cabinet was securely fastened, the princess seated herself in her arm-chair, and awaited the termination of the strange scene in which she found herself involved. Yet she could not subdue a certain degree of agitation.

Almost immediately the nun re-appeared, followed by the person whom we have already seen, on the day of the presentation, announce himself as the Count de Fenix.

He was dressed in the same costume, a Prussian uniform, with the military wig and black stock. His large expressive eyes were cast down at first in the presence of the royal abbess, but only in a manner to indicate the respect which any gentleman, how high soever his rank, was called on to exhibit before a princess of France. But immediately raising them again, with a look which almost implied that he had already shown too great humility:

"Madame," said he, "I thank your royal highness for the favour you have shown me; but I did not doubt that I should obtain this favour, knowing that your royal highness is the generous patron of all the unhappy."

"Sir, I endeavour to assist all such," replied the princess, with dignity; for she felt certain that she should, before the lapse of many minutes, put to shame this man, who so impudently dared to claim her protection, after having deceived and ill-treated one confided to his care.

The count bowed, without betraying any consciousness of understanding the double meaning of her words.

She then continued, with something of irony in her tone: "In what way can I render you any assistance, sir?"

"You can aid me in a matter of the greatest moment, madame."

"Speak, sir!"

"None but weighty considerations could have induced me, madame, to intrude on your royal highness in this retreat which you have chosen; but you have, I believe, given shelter here to a person in whom I am deeply interested."

"The name of that person, sir?"

"Lorenza Feliciani."

"And how does her fate concern you? Is she your relation, your sister?"

"She is my wife."

"Your wife?" said the princess, raising her voice so that she might be heard in the cabinet. "Lorenza Feliciani is the Countess de Fenix?"

"Yes, madame, Lorenza Feliciani is the Countess de Fenix," replied the count with the utmost coolness.

"I have no Countess de Fenix in this convent, sir," replied the princess.

But the count was not to be so repulsed. "Perhaps, madame," said he, "your royal highness is not convinced that Lorenza Feliciani and the Countess de Fenix are one and the same person?"

"I confess, sir, that you have guessed my thoughts; I am not well convinced on that point."

"If your royal highness will but command Lorenza Feliciani to be brought hither, you will soon have all doubts on that head cleared away. I entreat your highness's pardon for urging the matter thus, but I am tenderly attached to the young lady, and she herself, I think, regrets being separated from me."

"Do you think so, sir?"

"Yes, madame, unworthy as I am, I think so."

"Ah!" thought the princess, "Lorenza was right; this is indeed a most dangerous man."

The count preserved the most perfect calmness of demeanour, and adhered to the most courtly politeness.

"I must temporise," thought the princess to herself.

"Sir," said she, "I cannot give up to you a woman who is not here. If you love, as you say you do, the person whom you seek, I can easily understand why you thus persist in endeavouring to find her; but, believe me, to be successful, you must seek elsewhere."

The count, on entering the room, had cast a rapid glance on every article in it, and his eyes had rested for a single instant only, but that had been sufficient, on a table in a dark corner, on which Lorenza had placed those jewels which she had offered to pay as her dowry to the convent. He knew them again instantly.

"If your royal highness would have the goodness to recollect, and I venture to entreat you to do so, you will remember that Lorenza Feliciani was very lately in this room, that she placed on that table those jewels, and that, after having had the honour of conversing with your royal highness, she withdrew."

Just then he caught the eye of the princess turning unconsciously towards the cabinet. "She withdrew," he continued, "into that cabinet, so that now I only wait for the permission of your royal highness to order her to return hither, which she will do immediately. I feel certain."

The princess coloured with shame at the thought that she had lowered herself so far as to attempt to deceive this man, from whom, as it seemed, nothing could be hidden; and she could not conceal her vexation at the uselessness of all her efforts. She recollected, however, that Lorenza had fastened the door from within, and that, consequently, nothing but the impulse of her own free will could induce her to leave the cabinet.

"But even suppose she were here," said she, "what would she do?"

"Nothing, madame; she would merely tell your highness that she wishes to go with me, being my wife."

This last word re-assured the princess, for she recollected the protestations of Lorenza.

"Your wife!" exclaimed she, with indignation. "Are you sure of that?"

"Your highness does not seem to believe me. Nevertheless, it is not quite incredible that the Count de Fenix should have married Lorenza Feliciani, and that, having married her, he demands back his wife."

"His wife!" she repeated impatiently; "you dare to say Lorenza Feliciani is your wife?"

"Yes, madame, I dare to say so," answered the count, with the most natural air in the world, "because it is true."

"You are married to her?"

"I am."

"Legitimately."

"Certainly, and if your royal highness thus persists in doubting my word, I shall place before your eyes the register of my marriage, signed by the priest who united us."

The princess started; so much coolness and self-possession shook all her convictions.

The count opened his pocket-book and unfolded a paper. "This is the register of my marriage, madame, and the proof that I have a right to claim that woman as my wife; if your royal highness will read it and note the signature——"

"The signature!" repeated the princess, in a tone of doubt more insulting to the stranger than her indignation had been, "but if this signature——"

"This signature is that of the vicar of Saint Jean de Strasbourg, who is well known to Prince Louis, Cardinal de Rohan, and if his highness were here——"

"His highness is here!" cried the princess, fixing her flashing eyes on the count. "He has not yet left St. Denis, and is now with the canons of the cathedral; so that nothing is easier for us than to ascertain the truth of what you assert."

"That is indeed a fortunate circumstance for me," replied the count, coolly putting up the paper again in his pocket-book. "When your royal highness has heard the cardinal's testimony, I trust that your highness's unjust suspicions will be dispelled."

"Sir, this impudent perseverance is most revolting to me," said the princess, ringing her bell violently.

The nun who had introduced the count appeared.

"Let my groom mount his horse instantly, and carry this note to his highness the Cardinal de Rohan; he will be found at the chapter of the cathedral. Let him come hither without a moment's delay—I wait his arrival anxiously."

Whilst giving these directions, the princess wrote hastily a few words

on a slip of paper, and, handing it to the nun, she added in a whisper—"Let a couple of archers of the guard be placed in the corridor, and take care that no one leave the convent without my permission."

The count had followed all the movements of the princess, whom he now saw determined to contest the point with him to the very last; but, evidently decided not to yield the victory to her, he drew nearer to the door of the cabinet whilst she was writing, fixed his eyes on it, pronounced some words in a low voice, and extending his hands towards it, moved them to and fro with a regular and steady motion.

The princess, turning, saw him in this attitude, and exclaimed—"What are you doing there, sir?"

"Madame," said the count, "I am adjuring Lorenza Feliciani to appear, and declare to you of her own free will that I am not an impostor nor a forger. But this is not to prevent your royal highness from requiring the other proofs you have mentioned."

"Sir!"

"Lorenza Feliciani," cried the count, overpowering all opposition, even that of the princess, "leave that cabinet and come hither—come!"

But the door remained closed.

"Come forth!—It is my will!" repeated the count.

Then the key was heard turning in the lock, and the princess, with inexpressible alarm, saw the young girl enter, her eyes fixed on the count without any expression either of anger or hatred.

"What are you doing, my child?" cried the princess. "Why do you return to the man from whom you fled? You were in safety here—I told you so."

"She is also in safety in my house, madame," answered the count "Are you not, Lorenza? Are you not safe with me?"

"Yes!" replied the young girl.

The princess, overcome with astonishment, clasped her hands and sank back in her chair.

"And now, Lorenza," added the count, quietly, but yet with a tone of command, "I am accused of having made you act contrary to your wishes. Say, have I ever done so?"

"Never," answered the young girl, clearly and distinctly, yet without accompanying the denial by any movement.

"In that case," cried the princess, "what do you mean by all that tale of your having been carried off?"

Lorenza remained silent, and looked at the count as if life and speech hung on his lips.

"Her highness wishes doubtless to know how you left the convent, Lorenza. Relate to her all that happened, from the moment of your fainting until you awoke in the post-chaise."

Lorenza was still silent.

"Relate all that occurred from first to last—do not omit anything," continued the count; "it is my will that you should do so."

"I do not remember," she replied.

"Search your memory, and you will recollect all."

"Ah, yes, yes!" said Lorenza, in the same monotonous tone, "now I remember."

"Speak, then."

"When I fainted, at the very moment that the scissors touched my hair, I was carried back to my cell and laid on my bed. My mother remained with me until night, when, seeing that I continued in the same state of

insensibility, they sent for the village surgeon. He felt my pulse, passed a looking-glass before my lips, and, discovering no sign of life in me, pronounced me dead."

"But how do you know all that?" asked the princess.

"Her highness wishes to know how you know that," repeated the count.

"Strange!" replied Lorenza, "I was able to see and hear, but I could not open my eyes, nor speak, nor move. I was in a sort of lethargy."

"In fact," said the princess, "Tronchin has sometimes spoken to me of persons who had fallen into a lethargy, and who, being to all appearance dead, were interred alive."

"Proceed, Lorenza."

"My mother was in despair, and would not believe that I was dead; she said that she would pass that night and the following day by my side. She did so; but the thirty-six hours during which she watched over me passed away without my making the slightest movement, or without a sigh having escaped my lips. Thrice a priest came to visit my mother; and each time he told her that it was rebelling against the will of God thus to persist in keeping my body on earth when He possessed my soul; for, as I had died at the moment when I was pronouncing my vows, he did not doubt, he said, but that my soul had winged its flight to heaven. My mother, by her entreaties, prevailed on him to allow her to watch by me another night—that of Monday. On Tuesday morning they found me still insensible.

"My mother withdrew, vanquished, leaving me to the nuns, who by this time were loud in their exclamations against her impiety. The tapers were lighted in the chapel, in which, according to custom, I was to be laid out during one day and night. As I had not pronounced my vows, the sisters dressed me in a white robe, put a crown of white roses on my head, crossed my arms on my bosom, and placed my coffin on a bier. During this last operation a thrill of horror ran through my veins; for I repeat, although my eyelids were closed, I saw everything as if they had been wide open.

"The bier was carried into the church, and there—my face still uncovered, as is the custom in Italy—I was placed in the middle aisle, with lighted tapers around me, and a vase of holy water at my feet. During the day the peasants of Subiaco entered the church, prayed for me, and sprinkled my body with the holy water. Night came on; and, as the visitors had ceased, the doors of the church were closed, except a little side door, and the nun who took care of the sick remained alone beside me.

"One terrible thought never left me during my trance, and now it became more dreadful: on the morrow I was to be buried—buried alive, if some unknown power did not come to my aid! I heard the hours strike, one after another; first nine, then ten, then eleven. Each stroke found an echo in my trembling heart; for, oh, horror! I listened to my own death-knell.

"What efforts did I not make to break my icy sleep—to burst the iron bonds which held me down in my coffin! But heaven at last had pity on me. Midnight struck. At the very first stroke, my frame was shaken by a convulsive shudder, like that which I always experienced when Acharat approached me; then my heart was stirred, and I beheld him appear at the door of the church."

"Were your feelings at that moment those of fear?" asked the Count de Fenix.

"No; they were feelings of happiness, joy, ecstasy! For I knew that he came to snatch me from the dreadful death which seemed before inevitable. He advanced slowly towards my coffin, looked on me for a moment with a melancholy smile—then he said, 'Arise, follow me!' The bonds which fastened me were broken at that powerful voice; I rose, and I put one foot out of the coffin. 'Are you glad to live?' he asked. 'Oh, yes!' I replied. 'Follow me, then,' said he.

"The sister who was appointed to watch the dead had fulfilled this duty towards so many of the nuns that she had become careless and indifferent, and slept soundly in her chair. I passed close by her without awaking her, as I followed him, who, for the second time, had saved me from death. We reached the outer court and once more saw the cloudless firmament, studded with stars, and felt the cool night-breeze, which the dead feel not, but which is so grateful to the living.

"'And now,' said he, 'before leaving the convent, choose for yourself. Do you wish to be a nun or to follow me?' 'I will follow you,' I replied. We reached the entrance gate; it was locked. 'Where are the keys?' he asked. 'In the pocket of the portress, on a chair near her bed,' I replied. 'Enter the lodge,' said he, 'and bring them without making any noise to awake her.' I obeyed, entered the lodge, found the key, and brought it to him.

"Five minutes afterwards the gate was opened, and we were in the street. I took his arm, and we hurried toward the outskirts of the village of Subiaco. About a hundred paces from its last house a post-chaise was in waiting; we entered it and drove off at a rapid pace."

"And no force was used—no threat was uttered—you followed him voluntarily?"

Lorenza remained mute.

"Her royal highness asks you, Lorenza, if by any threat, any violence, you were forced to accompany me?"

"No."

"And why did you do so?"

"Say, why did you accompany me?"

"Because I loved you," said Lorenza.

The Count de Fenix turned towards the princess with a triumphant smile.

CHAPTER LII.

THE CARDINAL DE ROHAN.

STRONG as was the mind of the Princess Louise, all that she had just heard seemed so extraordinary to her, that she could not help asking herself whether the man who stood before her were not a real magician, disposing of hearts and understandings at his will.

But the Count de Fenix was not yet satisfied.

"That is not all, madame," said he, "and your royal highness has only heard a part of our history. Some doubts might remain on your mind did you not hear the rest from her own lips."

Then, turning towards the young woman—

"Do you remember, dear Lorenza," said he, "the rest of our journey?—and how we visited Milan, the lake Maggiore, the Oberland, the Righi, and the magnificent Rhine—the Tiber of the north?"

"Yes," answered she, still in the same monotonous voice—"yes; Lorenza saw all that."

"Dragged onwards by that man, was it not, my child?—yielding to an irresistible power which you did not yourself comprehend?" asked the princess.

"Why should you think so, madame, after what your highness has heard? But if you wish for yet more palpable and material proofs, here is a letter written by Lorenza to me. I was obliged to leave her alone for a short time at Mayence. Well! she regretted me and longed for my return; for in my absence she wrote me these lines which your highness may read."

The count took out of his pocket-book a note, which he handed to the princess. She read as follows:

"Return Acharat! When you leave me, all hope and joy depart. Ah, when shall I be yours through all eternity? "LORENZA."

The princess rose, anger flashing in her eyes, and approached Lorenza with the note in her hand. The young woman appeared neither to see nor hear her. Her whole soul seemed to hang on the count's lips.

"I understand," said the count, quickly, before the princess could utter a word; "your highness doubts whether this note be really written by her or not. That point can easily be settled. Lorenza, speak! Who wrote this note?"

He took the note, placed it in her hand, and she immediately pressed it to her heart.

"Lorenza wrote it," said she.

"Does Lorenza know what it contains?"

"Yes."

"Then tell the princess what is in the letter, that she may believe me when I say you love me. Tell her—it is my will."

Lorenza appeared to make an effort; then without opening the note, or turning her eyes on it, she read its contents.

"This is incredible," said the princess; "I cannot trust the evidence of my own senses; there is something inexplicable and supernatural in all this."

"It was this letter," continued the Count de Fenix, as if he had not heard what the princess said, "which determined me to hasten our marriage. I loved Lorenza as much as she loved me. We were in a position which might have given rise to unfounded suspicions. Besides, in the adventurous life which I lead, some accident might happen to me—I might be killed—I might die, and I wished, in case of such an event, that all my fortune should belong to Lorenza. On arriving at Strasbourg, therefore, we were married."

"You were married?"

"Yes, madame."

"It is impossible!"

"Why so, madame?" said the count, smiling. "What is there impossible in the fact that the Count de Fenix should marry Lorenza Feliciani!"

"But she told me that she is not your wife."

The count, without replying, turned to Lorenza: "Do you remember on what day we were married?" asked he.

"Yes," she replied; "it was the third of May."

"Where?"

"At Strasbourg.'

"In what church?"

"In the cathedral; in the chapel of St. John."

"Did you offer any opposition to our union."

"No; I was only too happy."

"Because, Lorenza," continued the count, "the princess thinks that the marriage was forced on you—that you hate me."

As he said these words he took Lorenza's hand: a thrill of rapture seemed to run through her whole frame.

"I hate you!" she exclaimed; "oh, no! I love you; you are good, you are generous, you are powerful!"

The count turned towards the princess, as if he had said, "You hear."

Seized with a kind of horror, the princess had recoiled from the pair before her, and sank at the foot of an ivory crucifix which was fastened against the black velvet hangings of the room.

"Does your royal highness wish for any further information?" asked the count, as he released Lorenza's hand.

"Sir," cried the princess, "do not approach me!—nor she either!"

At this moment the noise of wheels was heard in the courtyard, and a carriage stopped at the entrance door.

"Ah!" exclaimed the princess, "here comes the cardinal, and we shall now know the truth."

The Count de Fenix bowed, said a few words to Lorenza in a low voice, and waited with the patience of a man perfectly secure of his position. A moment afterwards the door opened, and his Eminence the Cardinal de Rohan was announced.

The princess, reassured by the presence of a third person, resumed her seat, and desired him to be admitted. The cardinal entered; but scarcely had he made his salutation to the princess, when, perceiving the count, he exclaimed with surprise, "You here, sir!"

"Do you know this person?" asked the princess, more and more astonished.

"Yes, madame," said the cardinal.

"Then," cried she, "you will tell me what he is."

"Nothing is more easy," replied the cardinal; "the gentleman is a sorcerer."

"A sorcerer!" murmured the princess.

"Pardon me, madame," said the count; "but I trust that his highness will explain his words to your satisfaction."

"Has the gentleman been making any predictions to your royal highness, that I see you with a countenance of so much alarm?" asked M. de Rohan.

"The register of the marriage! The register, immediately!" exclaimed the princess.

The cardinal stared with the utmost surprise, not comprehending what this exclamation meant.

"Here it is," said the count, presenting it to the cardinal.

"Sir, what is this?" said he.

"I wish to know," said the princess, "whether the signature to that document be genuine or not."

The cardinal took the paper and read it.

"Yes," said he, "it is a perfectly legal register of a marriage, and the signature is that of Monsieur Remy, vicar of St. John's, in Strasbourg. But in what way does that concern your royal highness?"

"Oh, it concerns me deeply, sir!—So the signature is correct?"

"Certainly; but I will not guarantee that it may not have been extorted——"

"Extorted!" cried the princess. "Yes, that is possible."

"And the consent of Lorenza, also?" said the count, with a tone of irony which was aimed directly at the princess.

"But by what means, cardinal—by what means could this signature have been extorted? Do you know?"

"By means which this gentleman has at his disposal—by means of magic!"

"Magic? Is it you, cardinal, who speak to me of magic?"

"Yes, I have said that this gentleman is a sorcerer; and I shall not unsay it."

"Your eminence must be jesting!"

"By no means; and the proof is, that I am going, in the presence of your highness, to have a very serious explanation with him."

"I was myself going to request it from your highness," said the count.

"Excellent! But pray, do not forget," said the cardinal, haughtily, "that it is I who am the questioner."

"And do not forget, also," said the count, "that I will answer all your questions before her royal highness, if you insist upon it; but I feel certain that you will not insist."

The cardinal smiled contemptuously.

"Sir," said he, "to play the magician well is, in our times, rather a difficult task. I have seen you at work, and, to do you justice, you were very successful; but every one will not show the patience, and, above all, the generosity, of her royal highness the dauphiness."

"The dauphiness!" exclaimed the princess.

"Yes, madame," said the count; "I have had the honour of being presented to her royal highness."

"And how did you repay that honour, sir? Come! Speak."

"Alas! much worse than I could have wished; for I have no personal hatred against men, and above all none against women."

"But what did he really do before my august niece?" asked the princess.

"I had the misfortune, madame, to tell her the truth, which she demanded of me."

"Yes," said the cardinal, "a truth which made her swoon!"

"Was it my fault," cried the count, in that commanding tone which he could at times assume, "was it my fault that the truth was so terrible that it produced such effects? Was it I who sought the princess? Did I request to be presented to her? On the contrary, I avoided her; I was brought before her almost by force, and she positively commanded me to reply to her questions."

"But what, then, sir, was that truth which you declare to have been so terrible?" asked the princess.

"The truth which was hidden by the veil of futurity. I raised the veil, and then she beheld that future which appeared so alarming to your royal highness, that you fled for shelter from it to a cloister to offer up tears and prayers before the altar——"

"Sir! sir!" cried the princess.

"Is it my fault, if the future, which was revealed to her as one of the sainted, was shadowed forth to me as a prophet, and if the dauphiness,

whom it threatens personally, terrified at the sight, fainted when I declared it to her?"

"You hear him acknowledge it!" said the cardinal.

"Alas!" sighed the princess.

"For her reign is doomed," continued the count, "as the most fatal and disastrous to the monarchy of any on record."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed the princess.

"For yourself, madame," continued the count, "your prayers have perhaps obtained favour, for you will not see those events which I foretell; you will be in the bosom of the Lord when they come to pass. But pray! Pray always!"

The princess, overcome by his prophetical words, which agreed too well with the terrors of her own soul, sank again on her knees at the foot of the crucifix, and commenced to pray fervently.

The count turned to the cardinal, and, preceding him towards the embrasure of a window, "Now that we are alone," said he, "what does your eminence wish with me?"

The cardinal hastened to join him. The princess seemed wholly absorbed in her prayers, and Lorenza remained silent and motionless in the middle of the room. Her eyes were wide open, but she seemed to see nothing. The two men stood apart in the embrasure of the window, half concealed by the curtains.

"What are your highness's wishes?" repeated the count.

"First, I wish to know who you are," replied the cardinal.

"Yet you seem to know. Did you not say that I was a sorcerer?"

"Yes; but when I met you formerly you were called Joseph Balsamo, and now you are called the Count de Fenix."

"Well, that only proves that I have changed my name, nothing more."

"Very true; but are you aware that such changes may make M. de Sartines, the minister of police, rather inquisitive about you?"

The count smiled.

"Oh, sir," said he, "this is a petty warfare for a Rohan! What! your eminence quibbles about names? *Verba et voces*, as the Latin has it. Is there nothing worse with which I can be reproached?"

"You seem to have become satirical," said the cardinal.

"I have not become so; it is my character."

"In that case I shall do myself the pleasure of lowering your tone a little."

"Do so, sir."

"I am certain I shall please the dauphiness by so doing."

"Which may be not altogether useless to you, considering the terms on which you stand at present with her," answered Balsamo, with the greatest coolness.

"And, suppose, most learned dealer in horoscopes, that I should cause you to be arrested?" said the cardinal.

"I should say that your eminence would commit a very grave mistake in doing so."

"Indeed?" said the prince-cardinal, with withering contempt, "And, pray, who will suffer from my mistake?"

"Yourself, my lord cardinal."

"Then I shall give the order for your arrest this moment, sir; and we shall soon know who this Baron Balsamo, Count de Fenix is, this illustrious branch of a genealogical tree not to be discovered in any field of heraldry Europe!"

"But why has your highness not asked for information respecting me from your friend the Count de Breteuil?"

"M. de Breteuil is no friend of mine."

"That is to say, he is no longer so. Yet he must have been one of your best friends when you wrote him a certain letter——"

"What letter?" asked the cardinal, drawing nearer to the count.

"A little closer, M. le cardinal, I do not wish to speak loud, for fear of compromising you—that letter which you wrote from Vienna to Paris, to endeavour to prevent the marriage of the dauphin."

The prelate could not repress a gesture of alarm.

"I know that letter by heart," continued the count, coldly.

"Then Breteuil has turned traitor?"

"How so?"

"Because when the marriage was decided on, I demanded back my letter, and he told me he had burned it!"

"Ah! he dared not tell you he had lost it!"

"Lost it?"

"Yes, and you know that a lost letter may be found by some one."

"And so my letter——"

"Was found by me. Oh! by the merest chance, I assure you, one day, when crossing the marble court at Versailles."

"And did you not return it to the Count de Breteuil?"

"I took good care not to do so."

"Why so?"

"Because, being a sorcerer, I knew that although I wished to be of all the service I could to your highness, you wished to do me all the harm you could. So, you understand——? A disarmed man who journeys through a wood, where he knows he will be attacked, would be a fool not to pick up a loaded pistol which he found at his foot."

The cardinal's head swam, and he was obliged to lean against the window-frame for a few minutes; but after an instant's hesitation, during which the count eagerly watched every variation of his countenance:

"So be it," said he. "It shall never be said that a prince of my house gave way before the threats of a charlatan. Though that letter should be shown to the dauphiness herself—though, in a political point of view, it ruin me, I shall maintain my character as a loyal subject and faithful ambassador. I shall say what is the truth, that I thought the alliance hurtful to the interests of my country, and my country will defend me, and weep for my fate."

"But if some one should happen to relate how the young, handsome, gallant ambassador, confident in the name of Rohan and the title of prince, and being most graciously received by the Archduchess Marie Antoinette, said so, not because he saw anything in the marriage hurtful to France, but because in his vanity he imagined he saw something more than affability in her manner toward him? What would the loyal subject and faithful ambassador reply then?"

"He would deny, sir, that there ever had existed the sentiment that your words imply; there is no proof that it did exist."

"Yes, sir, you mistake. There is the strongest proof, in the coldness of the dauphiness towards you."

The cardinal hesitated.

"My lord," said the count, "trust me it is better for us to remain good friends than to quarrel—which we should have done before this, had I not been more prudent than you."

"Good friends?"

"Why not? Our friends are those who render us good offices."

"Have I ever asked you for any?"

"No, and that is where you have been wrong; for during the two days you were in Paris——"

"I in Paris?"

"Yes, you. Why attempt to hide that from me, who am a sorcerer? You left the dauphiness at Soissons, you came post to Paris by Villers-Cotterets, and Dammartin—that is to say, the shortest road—and you hastened to request your kind friends there for assistance, which they all refused. After their refusals you once more set out post for Compiègne in despair."

The cardinal seemed overwhelmed.

"And what sort of assistance might I have expected from you," he asked, "had I addressed myself to you?"

"That assistance which a man who makes gold can grant."

"And what matters it to me that you can make gold?"

"Peste! when your highness has to pay five hundred thousand francs within forty-eight hours! Am I not right?—Is not that the sum?"

"Yes; that is indeed the sum."

"And yet you ask what matters it to have a friend who can make gold? It matters just this, that the hundred thousand francs which you cannot procure elsewhere, you may procure from him."

"And where?" asked the cardinal.

"In the Rue St. Claude."

"How shall I know your house?"

"By a griffin's head in bronze, which serves as knocker to the gate."

"When may I present myself?"

"The day after to-morrow, my lord, and afterwards you may come as often and whenever you please. But stay; we have just finished our conversation in time, for the princess, I see, has ended her prayers."

The cardinal was conquered, and, no longer attempting to resist, he approached the princess: "Madame," said he, "I am obliged to confess that the Count de Fenix is perfectly correct; his register of marriage is authentic and valid, and he has explained all the circumstances to my perfect satisfaction."

The count bowed. "Has your royal highness any further commands for me?" he asked.

"I wish to speak once more to the young woman," she replied. Then, turning to Lorenza, "Is it of your own free and unrestrained will that you leave this convent, in which you sought refuge?"

"Her highness asks you," said Balsamo, quickly, "whether it is of your own free and unfettered choice that you leave this convent. Answer, Lorenza."

"Yes," said the young woman, "it is of my own free and unfettered will."

"And to accompany your husband, the Count de Fenix?"

"And to accompany me?" repeated the count.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Lorenza.

"In that case," said the princess, "I wish to retain neither one nor other; for it would be doing violence to your feelings. But if there is in all this anything out of the common order of events, may the vengeance of Heaven fall on him who, for his own advantage or profit, troubles the harmony, the proper course of nature! Go, Count de Fenix! Go, Lorenza Feliciani!—only take with you your jewels."

"They are for the use of the poor, madame," said the count, "and distributed by your hands, the alms will be doubly acceptable to God. I only demand back my horse, Djerid."

"You can claim him as you pass, sir. Go."

The count bowed low, and gave his arm to Lorenza, who took it and left the room without uttering a word.

"Ah, my lord cardinal," said the princess, shaking her head sorrowfully, "there are incomprehensible and fatal omens in the very air which we breathe!"

CHAPTER LIII.

THE RETURN FROM SAINT DENIS.

AFTER leaving Philip, Gilbert, as we have said, had re-entered the crowd. But not now with a heart bounding with joyful anticipation did he throw himself into the noisy billow of human beings; his soul was wounded to the quick, and Philip's kind reception of him, and all his friendly offers of assistance, had no power to soothe him.

Andrée never suspected that she had been cruel to Gilbert. The lovely and serene young girl was entirely ignorant that there could be between her and the son of her nurse any point of contact either for pain or for pleasure. She revolved above all the lower spheres of life, casting light or shadow on them according as she herself was gay or sad. But now the shadow of her disdain had fallen on Gilbert and frozen him to the soul, while she, following only the impulse of her nature, knew not even that she had been scornful. But Gilbert, like a gladiator disarmed, had offered his naked breast to the full brunt of her haughty looks and disdainful words, and now, bleeding at every pore, his philosophy suggested nothing better than the consolation of despair.

From the moment that he once more plunged into the crowd, he cared neither for horses nor men. Collecting all his strength, he dashed forward like a wild boar with the spear in its side, and, at the risk of being crushed or trodden under foot, he opened a passage for himself through the multitude. When the denser mass of the people had been crossed, he began to breathe more freely, and looking round, he discovered that he was alone, and that around him was the green grass, the cool water, and solitude.

Without knowing whither he was going, he had advanced towards the Seine, and he now found himself opposite the isle of St. Denis. Exhausted, not from fatigue of body but from anguish of mind, he sunk on the turf, and grasping his head with both hands, he began to roar hoarsely, as if by these inarticulate sounds alone could he express his rage and grief.

All those vague and senseless hopes which until then had shed a glimmering light on the darkness of his soul, and whose existence he scarcely ventured to confess even to himself, were now at one blow utterly annihilated. To whatsoever height genius, science, or study might raise him in the social scale, he must to Andrée always remain the Gilbert that he had been: a thing or a man—to use her own words to her father—not worth the slighest regard, not worth even the trouble of being looked down on.

For a moment he had thought that, seeing him in Paris, learning that he had come on foot, knowing that he had determined to struggle out of obscurity into light—he had thought that Andrée would applaud his reso-

lution ; but, instead of applause, what had he met with as the reward of so much fatigue and of such firm determination ? The same scornful indifference with which he had been treated at Taverney. Even more—was she not almost angry when she heard that his eyes had had the audacity to look on her music-book ? Had he only touched that music-book with the tip of his finger, he would have been doubtless considered only worthy to be burned at the stake.

By weak characters, any deception, any mistake, with regard to those they love, is quickly forgotten, and they bend under the blow only to rise again stronger and more persevering than before. They vent their sufferings in complaints and tears, but their resistance is only passive; nay, their love often increases by that which should destroy it, and they whisper to themselves that their submissiveness will at last have its reward. Towards that reward they steadfastly advance, whether the road be easy or the reverse ; if it be unfavourable, they will be longer in attaining their end, that is all, but they will attain it at last.

It is not thus with strong minds, obstinate natures, and powerful wills. They are indignant when they see their own blood flowing ; at the sight their energy augments so furiously that they seem to hate rather than to love. Indeed, with them love and hate are so closely allied that they often are not aware of the transition from one to the other. So it was with Gilbert. When he flung himself on the ground, overcome by his feelings, did he love or hate Andrée ? He knew not ; he suffered intensely, that was all. But, not having the virtue of long-suffering, he shook off his dejection of soul, and determined to carry into practice some energetic resolution.

"She does not love me," thought he, "it is true ; but had I any right to hope that she would ? The only feeling that I had a right to hope for was that kindly interest which attaches to the unfortunate who strive with energy to rise above their wretchedness. Her brother felt this ; she did not feel it. He said, 'Who knows ? perhaps you may become a Colbert, a Vauban !' If I became either one or other he would do me justice ; he would give me his sister as a reward for the glory I had won for myself, as he would now give her in exchange for my personal nobility, had I been born his equal. But as for her—oh yes ! I feel it—yes, although Colbert or Vauban, I should never be to her other than Gilbert ! What she despises in me is what nothing can efface, nothing gild, nothing cover—it is the lowness of my birth. As if, supposing I attain my object, I should not then be greater, having risen to her level, than if I had been born beside her ! Ah, senseless, unthinking creature ! Woman !—woman !—that is, imperfection ! Do you trust in her open look, her expansive forehead, her beaming smile, her queenly carriage, her beauty which makes her worthy to be an empress ? Fool ! she is an affected, starched country girl, bound up, swathed, in aristocratic prejudices. The gay and showy young noblemen with empty heads—mere weathercocks—who have all the means and appliances for learning, but who know nothing—they are her equals ; they are things and men on whom she may bestow attention ! But Gilbert ?—Gilbert is a dog—nay, lower than a dog ! She asked, I think, for news of Mahon ; she did not ask how it had fared with Gilbert. Oh, she knows not then that I am as strong as they !—That, if clothed like them, I should be as handsome !—that I have what they have not, an inflexible will ; and that if I wished——"

A threatening smile curled his lip, and he left the sentence unfinished ; then slowly, and with a deep frown, his head sank on his breast. What

passed at that moment in his dark and gloomy soul? Under what terrible idea did that pale forehead, already furrowed with painful thoughts, droop? Who shall tell? Is it the boatman who slowly glides down the river in his skiff, humming the song of Henri-Quatre? Is it the laughing washer-woman who is returning from the splendid scene at St. Denis, and who, turning aside from her path to avoid him, probably takes the young loiterer for a thief, lying as he is at full length on the grass amidst the lines hung with linen.

After half-an-hour's reflection, Gilbert arose, calm and resolved. He approached the bank of the Seine, and refreshed himself with a deep draught of water; then, looking around, he saw on his left the distant waves of people pouring out of St. Denis. Amid the throng he could distinguish the principal carriages forced to go slowly from the crowd of spectators that pressed on them, and taking the road to St. Ouen.

The dauphiness had expressed a desire that her entrance into the kingdom should be a family festival, and the good Parisians had taken advantage of this kind wish to place their families so near the royal train, that many of them had mounted on the seats of the footmen, and some held on by the heavy springs which projected from the carriages, without manifesting the least fear.

Gilbert soon recognised Andrée's carriage; Philip was galloping, or rather, we should say, reining in his prancing horse, close beside it.

"It is well," said he; "I must know whither she is going, and for that purpose I must follow her."

The dauphiness was to sup at Muette in private with the king, the dauphin, the Count de Provence, and the Count d'Artois. At St. Denis the king had invited the dauphiness, and had given her a list of the guests and a pencil, desiring her to erase the name of any one whom she did not wish to be present. Now, it must be confessed that Louis carried his forgetfulness of the respect due to her so far as to include in it the name of Madame Dubarry. It was the last on the list, and when the dauphiness reached it her cheek turned pale and her lip quivered; but, following the instructions of the empress her mother, she recovered her self-possession, and with a sweet smile returning the list and the pencil to the king, she expressed herself most happy to be admitted thus from the first to the intimacy of his family circle.

Gilbert knew nothing of all this, and it was only at Muette that he discovered the equipage of the countess, followed by Zamore on his tall white charger. Fortunately it was dark; and, concealing himself behind a clump of trees, he lay down and waited.

The king supped with his daughter-in-law and his mistress, and was in charming spirits; more especially when he saw the dauphiness receive the countess even more graciously than she had done at Compiègne. But the dauphin seemed grave and anxious, and, pretending that he suffered from a violent headache, retired before they sat down to supper. The entertainment was prolonged until eleven o'clock.

In the meantime the retinue of the dauphiness—and the haughty Andrée was forced to acknowledge that she formed one of them—supped in tents to the music of the king's private band, who had been ordered to attend for that purpose. Besides these—as the tents could not accommodate all—fifty gentlemen supped at tables spread in the open air, waited on by fifty lackeys in the royal livery.

Gilbert, still hidden in the clump of trees, lost nothing of this spectacle; whilst he supped at the same time as the others on a piece of bread which he had bought at Clichy-la-Garenne.

After supper, the dauphiness and the king appeared on a balcony to take leave of their guests. As each person departed, he passed below the balcony to salute his majesty and her royal highness. The dauphiness already knew many who had accompanied her from Compiègne, and those whom she did not know the king named to her. From time to time, a gracious word or a well-turned compliment fell from her lips, diffusing joy in the breasts of those to whom it was addressed.

Gilbert, from his distant post, saw the meanness of their homage, and murmured, "I am greater than those people, since for all the gold in the world I would not do what they are doing."

At last the turn of the Baron de Taverney and his family came. Gilbert rose on one knee.

"M. Philip," said the dauphiness, "I give you leave of absence, in order that you may accompany your father and your sister to Paris."

Gilbert heard these words distinctly, which, in the silence of the night, and amidst the respectful attention of all around, vibrated in his ears.

Then she added: "Monsieur de Taverney, I cannot promise you apartments until I instal my household at Versailles. You can, therefore, in the meantime, accompany your daughter to Paris. Do not forget me, mademoiselle."

The baron passed on with his son and daughter. They were succeeded by many others, to whom the dauphiness made similar speeches, but Gilbert cared no longer for her words. He glided out of the clump of trees and followed the baron amidst the confused cries of two hundred footmen running after their masters and calling to a hundred coachmen, while their shouts were accompanied by the thundering of numerous carriages rolling along the paved road.

As the baron had one of the carriages of the court at his command, it waited for them apart from the general crowd. When, accompanied by Andrée and Philip, he had entered it, the latter said to the footman who was closing the door, "Mount on the seat beside the coachman, my friend."

"Why so? why so?" asked the baron, hastily.

"Because the poor devil has been on his legs since morning, and must be tired by this time."

The baron grumbled something which Gilbert did not hear, while the footman mounted beside the coachman.

Gilbert drew nearer. At the moment when they were about to start, it was perceived that the trace had become unbuckled. The coachman jumped down, and the coach remained for a few moments stationary.

"It is very late," said the baron.

"I am dreadfully fatigued," said Andrée. "Are you sure we shall get beds?"

"I hope so," said Philip; "I sent on La Brie and Nicole from Soissons with a letter to a friend of mine, desiring him to engage a small garden pavilion for us, which his mother and sister occupied last year. It is not a very splendid abode, but it is suitable enough; you do not wish to receive company—you only want a stopping-place for the present."

"Faith," exclaimed the baron, "whatever it is, it will be better than Taverney."

"Unfortunately, father, that is true," replied Philip, in a melancholy tone.

"Are there any trees?" asked Andrée.

"Oh yes; and very fine ones too. But, in all probability, you will not

have long to enjoy them, for as soon as the marriage is over, you will be presented at court."

"Well, this is all a dream, I fear," said the baron; "do not awake us too soon, Philip. Have you given the proper direction to the coachman?"

Gilbert listened anxiously.

"Yes, father."

Gilbert, who had heard all this conversation, had for a moment hoped to discover the address.

"No matter," said he, "I shall follow them; it is only a league to Paris."

The trace was fastened, the coachman mounted his seat, and the carriage was again in motion.

But the king's horses go fast when they are not in a procession which obliges them to go slowly, and now they darted forward so rapidly that they recalled to poor Gilbert's recollection the road to Lachaussée, his weakness, and his fainting. He made an effort and reached the footboard behind, which was vacant, as the weary footman was seated beside the coachman. Gilbert grasped it, sprang up, and seated himself. But scarcely had he done so, when the thought struck him that he was behind Andrée's carriage, and in the footman's place.

"No, no," muttered the inflexible young man, "it shall never be said that I did not struggle to the last; my legs are tired, but my arms are strong."

Then, seizing the footboard with his hands, he followed at full speed, supported by the strength of his arms, and keeping his hold in spite of jolts and shocks, rather than capitulate with his conscience.

"At least I shall know her address," murmured he. "True, I shall have to pass one more bad night; but to-morrow I shall rest whilst I copy my music. Besides, I have still some money, and I may take two hours for sleep if I like."

Then he reflected that as Paris was such a large place, and as he was quite unacquainted with it, he might lose his way after the baron and his daughter should have entered the house chosen for them by Philip. Fortunately it was then near midnight, and day would break at half-past three.

As all these reflections passed through Gilbert's mind, he remarked that they were passing through a spacious square, in the centre of which was a large equestrian statue.

"Ha! This looks like the Place des Victoires," cried he, with a mingled sensation of surprise and joy.

The carriage turned. Andrée put her head out of the window and looked back. "It is the statue of the late king," said Philip; "we are now near the house."

They descended a steep street so rapidly that Gilbert was nearly thrown under the wheels.

"Here we are, at last!" cried Philip.

Gilbert sprang aside, and hid himself behind the corner of the neighbouring street.

Philip leaped out, rang the bell, and turning, received Andrée in his arms.

The baron got out last.

"Well," cried he, "are those scoundrels going to keep us here all night?"

At that moment the voices of La Brie and Nicole were heard, and a gate

was opened. The three travellers disappeared in a dark court, and the gate closed behind them.

The carriage drove off on its way to the king's stable. The house which had received the strangers was in no way remarkable in its appearance; but the lamps of the carriage, in passing, had flashed on that next to it, and Gilbert read over the gateway the words "*Hôtel d'Armenonville.*"

It only remained for him to discover the name of the street. He gained the nearest extremity, that by which the carriage had disappeared, and to his great surprise he found himself close to the fountain at which he was in the habit of drinking. He advanced a few steps farther in a street parallel to that which he had left, and discovered the baker's shop where he usually bought his loaf. Doubting still, he went back to the corner of the street; and there, by the light of a neighbouring lamp, he read the words which had struck him when returning with Rousseau from their botanical excursion in the forest of Meudon three days before—Rue Plastrière! Andrée, consequently, was not one hundred paces distant from him—not so far off as she had been at Taverney, when he slept in his little room at the castle gate!

Then he regained his domicile, scarcely daring to hope to find the end of the cord left out, by which the latch of the door was lifted. But Gilbert's star was in the ascendant; a few ravelled threads were hanging out, by which he pulled the whole, and the door opened gently at his touch.

He felt his way to the stairs, mounted step by step without making the least noise, and at last put his hand on the padlock of the garret door, in which Rousseau had kindly left the key.

Ten minutes afterwards, fatigue asserted its power over his disquieted thoughts, and he slept soundly, although longing for the morrow.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE GARDEN PAVILION.

HAVING come in late, and thrown himself hastily on his bed, Gilbert had forgotten to place over his window the blind which intercepted the light of the rising sun. At five o'clock, therefore, the rays of light beaming through the window awoke him. He sprang up, fearing that he had slept too long.

Accustomed as he had been to a country life, Gilbert could guess the hour at all times with the utmost precision by the direction of the shadows, and by the paler or warmer tints of light. He ran, therefore, to consult his clock.

The faintness of the morning beams, barely tinging with their light the topmost boughs of the trees, re-assured him: and he found that instead of having risen too late, he had risen too early. He finished his toilet at the garret window, thinking over the events of the preceding day, and exposing with delight his burning and oppressed forehead to the refreshing morning breeze. Then he remembered that Andrée lodged in the next street, near the Hotel d'Armenonville, and he tried to guess in which of all the houses that he saw she might be.

The sight of the lofty trees on which he looked down, recalled her question to Philip—"Are there any trees there?"

"Might they not have chosen that uninhabited house in the garden?" said Gilbert to himself.

This idea naturally led him to fix his attention on the garden pavilion, where, by a singular coincidence, a sort of noise and stir began to be apparent.

One of the window-shutters of the little abode, which had not been opened apparently for a considerable time, was shaken by an awkward or feeble hand. The wood yielded above, but held fast, by the damp no doubt, to the frame at the bottom, it resisted the effort made to open it. A second shake more violent than the first had a better effect; the two shutters creaked, gave way, and falling back quickly, exposed to view a young girl all in a glow with her exertions, and beating off the dust from her hands.

Gilbert uttered a cry of surprise, and stepped back. The young girl, whose face was still flushed with sleep, and who was stretching herself in the fresh air, was Mademoiselle Nicole.

There was no longer any room for doubt. The lodging which Philip had said La Brie and Nicole were preparing was the house before him, and the mansion through whose gateway he had seen the travellers disappear must have its gardens adjoining the rear of the Rue Plastrière. Gilbert's movement was so abrupt, that if Nicole had not been completely absorbed in the lazy meditation so delightful at the moment of waking, she must have discovered our philosopher at his skylight.

But Gilbert had retired all the more speedily, as he had no intention that Nicole, of all persons in the world, should spy him out in so elevated a situation. Had he been on a first floor, and had his open window showed a background of rich hangings or sumptuous furniture, he would not have been so anxious to avoid her eye; but a garret on the fifth story declared him to be still so low in the social scale, that he took the greatest care to hide himself. Moreover, there is always, in this world, a great advantage in seeing without being seen. And then, if Andrée should discover that he watched her, would it not be sufficient either to induce her to change her abode, or prevent her walking in the garden?

Alas! Gilbert's pride still made him of too great importance in his own eyes. What was Gilbert to Andrée? Would she have moved her finger, either to approach or to avoid him? But these were far from being Nicole's sentiments, and her, consequently, he must shun.

He hid himself carefully therefore; but as he did not wish to withdraw from the window entirely, he ventured to peep out cautiously at one corner.

A second window on the ground-floor of the pavilion, exactly below the first, just then opened, and a white form appeared at it. It was Andrée, seemingly just awakened. She was enveloped in a dressing-gown, and was occupied in searching for the slipper which had escaped from her tiny foot, and was lying beneath a chair. It was in vain that Gilbert, each time that he saw Andrée, vowed to bui'd up between them a barrier of hatred instead of giving way to love; the same effect was produced by the same cause. He was obliged to lean against the wall for support; his heart palpitated as if it would have burst, and sent the blood in boiling currents through his whole frame. However, by degrees, his throbbing arteries beat with a calmer motion, and reflection resumed her sway. The problem he had to solve was, as we have said, to see without being seen. He took one of Therese's gowns and fastened it with a pin to one of the cords which crossed his window; and, sheltered by this impromptu curtain, he

could watch Andrée without running any risk of being discovered by her. The lovely young girl, following Nicole's example, stretched out her snowy arms, and then, folding them on the window, she looked out on the garden. Her countenance expressed the liveliest satisfaction at all she saw. Lofty trees shaded the walks with their drooping branches, and everywhere verdure cheered her eye. She, who smiled so seldom on human beings, smiled on the inanimate objects around her.

The house in which Gilbert lived attracted her eye for a moment, like all the others which surrounded the garden; but as from her apartment only the garrets of the houses were visible, and, consequently, from them alone could she be seen, she paid no farther attention. How could the proud young girl take any interest in the concerns of a race so far removed from her sphere? Andrée felt convinced, therefore, that no one saw her by whom it was of the least importance that she should not be seen, and that within the bounds of her tranquil retreat there appeared none of those prying or satirical Parisian faces so much dreaded by ladies from the provinces.

The effect was immediate. Leaving her window wide open, so that the fresh and perfumed air might penetrate to the farthest extremity of her apartment, she proceeded towards the mantelpiece and rang a bell.

Nicole appeared, undid the straps of a shagreen dressing-case of the reign of Queen Anne, took from it a tortoise-shell comb, and began to comb out Andrée's hair. In a moment the long tresses and shining curls spread like a glossy veil over her shoulders.

Gilbert gave a stifled sigh. At that distance he scarcely saw the beauty of her locks, but he saw Andrée herself, a thousand times more lovely in this deshabille than she would have been in the most splendid attire. He gazed, his whole soul in his eyes.

By chance, as Nicole continued to dress her hair, Andrée raised her eyes and fixed them on Gilbert's garret.

"Yes, yes!" said he, "look—gaze, as much as you please—it is all in vain—you can see nothing, and I see all."

But Gilbert was mistaken; Andrée did see something. It was the gown which he had hung up, and which, being blown about, had got wrapped round his head like a turban. She pointed out this strange object to Nicole.

Nicole, stopping in her complicated task, pointed with the comb which she held in her hand towards the skylight, and seemed to ask her mistress if that were the object which she meant.

All these gestures, which Gilbert devoured with the greatest eagerness, had, without his suspecting it, a third spectator. Suddenly a rude hand snatched Therese's gown from his head, and he was ready to sink with shame on seeing Rousseau beside him.

"What the devil are you doing there, sir?" cried the philosopher, with a terrible frown, and a scrutinising glance at the gown borrowed, without leave asked, from his wife.

"Nothing, sir, nothing at all," replied Gilbert, endeavouring to turn Rousseau's attention from the window.

"Nothing? Then why did you hide yourself with the gown?"

"The sun hurts my eyes."

"This window looks towards the west, and the sun dazzles you when rising? You have very delicate eyes, young man!"

Gilbert stammered out some unconnected words, but, feeling that he was only getting deeper in the mire, he at last hid his head in his hands.

"You are speaking falsely, and you are afraid," said Rousseau; "therefore you have been doing wrong."

After this terrible syllogism, which seemed to complete Gilbert's confusion, Rousseau planted himself exactly opposite the window.

From a feeling too natural to require explanation, Gilbert, who so lately trembled to be discovered at the window, rushed forwards when he saw Rousseau standing before it.

"Ah, ah!" said the latter, in a tone which froze the blood in Gilbert's veins; "the garden-house is inhabited now."

Gilbert was dumb.

"And by persons," continued the philosopher, "who seem to know my house, for they are pointing to it."

Gilbert, trembling lest he had advanced too far, stepped back quickly; but neither his movement, nor the cause which produced it, escaped the jealous eye of Rousseau; he saw that Gilbert feared to be seen.

"No," cried he, seizing the young man by the arm, "you shall not escape, my young friend; there is some plot under this, I know by their pointing to your garret. Place yourself here, if you please;" and he dragged him opposite the skylight, in the full view of those beneath.

"Oh! no, sir; no—have mercy!" cried Gilbert, struggling to escape.

But to escape, which for a young and active man like Gilbert would have been an easy task, he must have engaged in a contest with Rousseau—Rousseau, whom he venerated like some superior being—and respect restrained him.

"You know those women," said Rousseau; "and they know you?"

"No, no, no, sir!"

"Then if you do not know them, and if they do not know you, why not show yourself?"

"Monsieur Rousseau, you have sometimes had secrets yourself. Show some pity for mine."

"Ah! traitor!" cried Rousseau. "Yes, I know what sort of a secret yours is. You are a creature of Grimm or Holbach's,—you have been tutored to act a part in order to impose upon my benevolence—you have gained admittance into my house, and now you betray me to them. Oh, thrice-sodden fool that I am! Silly lover of nature! I thought I was aiding a fellow-creature, and I was bringing a spy into my house!"

"A spy!" exclaimed Gilbert, indignantly.

"Come, Judas, on what day am I to be sold?" continued Rousseau, folding Therese's gown tragically about him, and thinking himself sublime in his grief, when unfortunately he was only ridiculous.

"Sir, you calumniate me," said Gilbert.

"Calumniate you, you little serpent!" exclaimed Rousseau. "Did I not find you corresponding with my enemies by signs? Making them understand, perhaps, what is the subject of my new work?"

"Sir, had I gained admittance to your house in order to betray the secret of your work, it would have been easier for me to copy some of the manuscripts in your desk than to inform others of the subject by signs."

This was true; and Rousseau felt so plainly that he had given utterance to one of those absurdities which escaped him when his monomania of suspicion was at its height, that he got angry.

"Sir," said he, "I am sorry for you, but experience has made me severe. My life has been one long series of deceptions. I have been ever the victim of treachery; I have been betrayed, sold, made a martyr, by every one that surrounded me. I am, you must be aware, one of those illustrious

unfortunates on whom government has put its ban. In such a situation it is pardonable to be suspicious. Now, I suspect you, therefore you shall leave my house."

Gilbert was far from expecting this peroration. To be turned out? He clenched his hands tightly, and a flash of anger, which almost made Rousseau tremble, lighted up his eyes. The flash was only momentary however, for the thought occurred to him, that in leaving Rousseau's house he should lose the happiness of seeing Andrée every hour of the day, as well as forfeit the friendship of Rousseau; this would be to add misery to shame. His untameable pride gave way, and, clasping his hands: "Sir," said he, "listen to me! One word, only one word!"

"I am pitiless," said Rousseau; "men have made me by their injustice more cruel than the tiger. You are in correspondence with my enemies. Go to them, I do not prevent you. League with them, I do not oppose your doing so. Only leave my house!"

"Sir, those two young girls are not your enemies; they are Mademoiselle Andrée and Nicole."

"And who is Mademoiselle Andrée?" said Rousseau, who had heard Gilbert pronounce this name twice or thrice before, and was, consequently, not entirely unacquainted with it; "come! who is Mademoiselle Andrée? Speak!"

"Mademoiselle Andrée, sir, is the daughter of the Baron de Taverney. Oh, pardon me, sir, for daring to say so to you, but I love her more than you ever loved Mademoiselle Galley or Madame de Warens! It is she whom I have followed on foot to Paris, without money and without bread, until I fell down on the road exhausted with hunger and fatigue. It is she whom I went to see yesterday at St. Denis, whom I followed, unseen by her, to Muette, and from that to a street near this. It is she whom by chance I discovered this morning to be the occupant of this garden-house; and it is she for whose sake I burn to be a Turenne, a Richelieu, or a Rousseau!"

Rousseau knew the human heart; and felt assured that no one acting a part could speak with the trembling and impassioned accents of Gilbert, or accompany his words with gestures so true to nature.

"So," said he, "this young lady is Mademoiselle Andrée?"

"Yes, Monsieur Rousseau."

"Then you know her?"

"Sir, I am the son of her nurse."

"Then you lied just now when you said you did not know her; and if you are not a traitor, you are a liar."

"Sir, you tear my very heart! Indeed, you would hurt me less were you to kill me on the spot."

"Pshaw! Mere phrases! Style of Diderot and Marmontel! You are a liar, sir."

"Well; yes, yes!" said Gilbert, "I am a liar, sir; and so much the worse for you if you do not feel for one so forced to lie. A liar! a liar! I leave you, sir, but I leave you in despair, and my misery will one day weigh heavy on your conscience."

Rousseau stroked his chin as he looked at this young man, in whom he found so many points of character resembling his own.

"He has either a great soul, or he is a great rogue," said he to himself; "but if they are plotting against me, why not hold in my hand a clue to the plot?"

Gilbert had advanced toward the door, and now, with his hand on the lock, stood waiting for the fiat which was to banish or recall him.

"Enough on this subject, my son," said Rousseau. "If you are as deeply in love as you say, so much the worse for you. But it is now late; you lost the whole of yesterday, and we have to-day thirty pages to copy. Quick, Gilbert. Be on the alert!"

Gilbert seized the philosopher's hand, and pressed it to his lips; he would not certainly have done so much for a king's. But before leaving the room, and whilst Gilbert, still deeply moved, stood leaning against the door, Rousseau again placed himself at the window to take a last look at the young girls. Andrée had just thrown off her dressing-gown, and taken her gown from Nicole's hands. She saw his pallid countenance and searching eye, and, starting back, she ordered Nicole to close the window. Nicole obeyed.

"So," said Rousseau, "my old face frightens her; his young one would not have had the same effect. Oh, lovely youth!" added he, sighing:

"O gioventu primavera dell' eta!
O primavera gioventu dell' anno!"

and, once more hanging up Therese's gown on its nail, he went down stairs in a melancholy mood, followed by Gilbert, for whose youth he would, perhaps, at that moment have exchanged his renown, which then rivalled that of Voltaire, and shared with it the admiration of the world.

CHAPTER LV.

THE HOUSE IN THE RUE ST. CLAUDE.

THE Rue St. Claude, in which the Count de Fenix had appointed to meet the Cardinal de Rohan, was not so different at that period from what it is at the present day, but that some vestiges of the localities we are about to describe may yet be discovered. It abutted then, as it does now, on the Rue St. Louis and the boulevard, to the latter of which it descended with rather a steep inclination. It boasted of fifteen houses and seven lanterns, and was remarkable besides for two lanes, or *culs de sac*, which branched off from it, the one on the left, the other on the right; the former serving as the boundary of the Hotel de Voysins, while the latter took a slice off the large garden of the Convent of St. Sacrament. This last mentioned lane, shaded on one side by the trees of the convent garden, was bordered on the other by the high dark wall of a house, the front of which looked towards the Rue St. Claude.

This wall, resembling the visage of a cyclops, had only one eye, or if the reader like it better, only one window; and even that, covered with bars and grating, was horribly gloomy.

Just below this window, which was never opened, as one might perceive from the spiders' webs that curtained it over, was a door studded with large nails, which indicated, not that the house was entered, but that it might be entered, on this side.

There were no dwellings in this lane, and only two inhabitants. These were a cobbler in a wooden box, and a stocking-mender in a cask, both shading themselves from the heat under the acacias of the convent garden, which threw their broad shadow on the dusty lane from nine in the morning. In the evening the stocking-mender returned to her domicile, the cobbler put a padlock on his castle, and no guardian watched over the

lonely street, save the stern and sombre eye of the window we have spoken of.

Besides the door just mentioned, the house which we have undertaken to describe so accurately had another and the principal entrance in the Rue St. Claude. This entrance was a large gateway surmounted with carved figures in relief, which recalled the architecture of the times of Louis XIII., and was adorned with the griffin's head for a knocker which the Count de Fenix had indicated to the Cardinal de Rohan as distinguishing his abode.

As for the windows, they looked on the boulevard, and were opened early in the morning to admit the fresh air. But as Paris, at that period, and above all in that quarter, was far from safe, it occasioned no astonishment to see them grated, and the walls near them bristling with iron spikes. Indeed, the whole appearance of the house, at the first glance, suggested the idea of a fortress. Against enemies, thieves, or lovers, it presented iron balconies with sharp points ; a deep moat separated the building from the boulevard, and to obtain entrance on this side it would have required ladders at least thirty feet long, for the wall which enclosed, or rather buried, the courtyard was fully that height.

This house, before which in the present day a spectator would be arrested by curiosity on beholding its singular aspect, was not very remarkable in 1770. On the contrary, it seemed to harmonise with the quarter of the city in which it stood, and if the worthy inhabitants of the Rue St. Louis, and the not less worthy denizens of the Rue St. Claude, shunned its neighbourhood, it was not on account of its reputation, which was then intact, but on account of the lonely boulevard of the Porte St. Louis, and the Pont aux Choux, both of which were in very bad odour with the Parisians. In fact, the boulevard on this side led to nothing but the Bastille, and as there was not more than a dozen houses in the space of a quarter of a league, the city authorities had not thought it worth their while to light such a desert region. The consequence was, that after eight o'clock in summer, and four in winter, the vacuum became a sort of chaos, with the agreeable addition of robbers.

It was, however, on this very boulevard, towards nine o'clock in the evening, and about three quarters of an hour after the visit to St. Denis, that a carriage drove rapidly along. It bore the coat of arms of the Count de Fenix on its panels. The count himself, mounted on Djerid, who whisked his long and silky tale as he snuffed the stifling atmosphere, rode about twenty paces in advance. Within it, resting on cushions, and concealed by the closed blinds, lay Lorenza fast asleep. The gate opened, as if by enchantment, at the noise of the wheels, and the carriage, after turning into the dark gulf of the Rue St. Claude, disappeared in the courtyard of the house we have just described, the gate of which seemed to close behind it without the aid of human hands.

There was most assuredly no occasion for so much mystery, since no one was there to see the Count de Fenix return, or to interfere with him had he carried off in his carriage the treasures of the Abbey of St. Denis.

In the mean time we shall say a few words respecting the interior of this house, of which it is of importance that our readers should know something, since it is our intention to introduce them to it more than once.

In the courtyard of which we have spoken, and in which the springing grass laboured by a never-ceasing effort to displace the pavement, were seen on the right the stables, on the left the coach-houses, while at the back a double flight of twelve steps led to the entrance door.

On the ground-floor, the house, or at least as much of it as was accessible, consisted of a large ante-chamber, a dining-room, remarkable for the quantity of massive plate heaped on its sideboards, and a saloon, which seemed quite recently furnished, probably for the reception of its new inmates.

From the ante-chamber a broad staircase led to the first-floor, which contained three principal apartments. A skilful geometrician, however, on measuring with his eye the extent of the house outside, and observing the space within it, would have been surprised to find it contain so little accommodation. In fact, in the outside apparent house there was a second hidden house, known only to those who inhabited it.

In the ante-chamber, close beside a statue of the god Harpocrates—who, with his finger on his lips, seemed to enjoin the silence of which he is the symbol—was concealed a secret door opening with a spring, and masked by the ornaments of the architecture. This door gave access to a staircase which, ascending to about the same height as the first floor on the other staircase, led to a little apartment lighted by two grated windows looking on an inner court. This inner court was the box, as it were, which enclosed the second house and concealed it from all eyes.

The apartment to which this staircase led was evidently intended for a man. Beside the bed, and before the sofas and couches, were spread instead of carpets the most magnificent furs which the burning climes of Africa and India produced. There were skins of lions, tigers, and panthers, with their glaring eyes and threatening teeth. The walls, hung with Cordova leather stamped in large and flowing arabesques, were decorated with weapons of every kind, from the tomahawk of the Huron to the crid of the Malay; from the sword of the crusader to the kandjiar of the Arab; from the arquebuss, incrusted with ivory, of the sixteenth century, to the damasked barrel inlaid with gold of the eighteenth. The eye in vain sought in this room for any other outlet than that from the staircase; perhaps there were several, but, if so, they were concealed and invisible.

A German domestic, about five-and-twenty or thirty years of age, the only human being who had been seen wandering to and fro in that vast mansion for several days, bolted the gate of the courtyard; and, opening the carriage-door whilst the stolid coachman unharnessed his horses, he lifted out Lorenza in his arms and carried her into the ante-chamber. There he laid her on a table, covered with red cloth, and drew down her long white veil over her person.

Then he left the room to light at the lamps of the carriage a large chandelier, with seven branches, and returned with all its lights burning. But in that interval, short as it was, Lorenza had disappeared.

The Count de Fenix had followed close behind the German, and had no sooner been left alone with Lorenza than he took her in his arms and carried her by the secret staircase we have described to the chamber of arms, after having carefully closed both the doors behind him. Once there, he pressed his foot on a spring in the corner of the lofty mantelpiece, and immediately a door, which formed the back of the fireplace, rolled back on its noiseless hinges, and the count with his burden again disappeared, carefully closing behind him with his foot the mysterious door.

At the back of the mantelpiece was a second staircase, consisting of a flight of fifteen steps covered with Utrecht velvet, after mounting which he reached a chamber elegantly hung with satin, embroidered with flowers, of such brilliant colours and so naturally designed, that they might have

been taken for real. The furniture was richly gilt. Two cabinets of tortoise-shell inlaid with brass; a harpsichord, and a toilet-table of rose-wood, a beautiful bed, with transparent curtains, and several vases of Sèvres porcelain, formed the principal articles; whilst chairs and couches, arranged with the nicest order in a space of thirty feet square, served to complete the decoration of the apartment, to which was attached a dressing-closet and a boudoir. These latter had no windows; but lamps filled with perfumed oil burned in them day and night, and, let down from the ceiling, were trimmed by invisible hands. The sleeping-chamber, however, had two windows hung with rich and heavy curtains; but, as it was now night, the curtains had nothing to conceal.

Not a sound, not a breath was heard in this chamber, and an inhabitant might have thought himself a hundred miles from the world. But gold, cunningly wrought, shone on every side; beautiful paintings smiled from the walls; and lustres of coloured Bohemian glass glittered and sparkled like eyes looking on the scene, when, after having placed Lorenza on a sofa, the count, not satisfied with the trembling radiance of the boudoir, proceeded to light the rose-coloured wax-candles of two candelabra on the chimneypiece.

Then, returning to Lorenza and placing himself before her, he knelt with one knee on a pile of cushions, and exclaimed softly, "Lorenza!"

The young girl, at this appeal, raised herself on her elbow, although her eyes remained closed. But she did not reply.

"Lorenza," he repeated, "do you sleep in your ordinary sleep, or in the magnetic sleep?"

"In the magnetic sleep," she answered.

"Then, if I question you, you can reply?"

"I think so."

The Count de Fenix was silent for a moment, then he continued:

"Look in the apartment of the Princess Louise, whom we left three quarters of an hour ago."

"I am looking."

"What do you see?"

"The princess is praying before retiring to bed."

"Do you see the Cardinal de Rohan in the convent?"

"No."

"In any of the corridors or courts?"

"No."

"Look whether his carriage be at the gate?"

"I do not see it."

"Pursue the road by which we came. Do you see carriages on it?"

"Yes; several."

"Do you see the cardinal's among them?"

"No."

"Come nearer Paris—now?"

"Now I see it."

"Where?"

"At the gate of the city."

"Has it stopped?"

"Yes; the footman has just got down."

"Does the cardinal speak to him?"

'Yes; he is going to speak."

"Lorenza, attend! It is important that I should know what the cardinal says."

"You should have told me to listen in time. But, stop!—the footman is speaking to the coachman."

"What does he say?"

"The Rue St. Claude, in the Marais, by the boulevard."

"Thanks, Lorenza."

The count wrote some words on a piece of paper, which he folded round a plate of copper, doubtless to give it weight; then he pulled a bell, pressed a spring, and, a small opening appearing in the wall, he dropped the note down. The opening closed again instantly. It was in this way that the count, in the inner apartments of his house, gave his orders to Fritz, his German servant.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DOUBLE EXISTENCE—SLEEP.

RETURNING to Lorenza, Balsamo said, "Will you converse with your friend now?"

"Oh, yes!" she replied. "But speak yourself the most—I love so to hear your voice."

"Lorenza, you have often said that you would be happy if you could live with me, shut out from all the world."

"Yes; that would be happiness indeed!"

"Well, your wish is realised. No one can follow us to this chamber—no one can enter here; we are alone, quite alone."

"Ah, so much the better."

"Tell me, is this apartment to your taste?"

"Order me to see it, then."

"I order you."

"Oh, what a charming room!"

"You are pleased with it, then?" asked the count, tenderly.

"Oh, yes! There are my favourite flowers—my vanilla heliotropes, my crimson roses, my Chinese jessamines!—Thanks, my sweet Joseph; how kind and good you are!"

"I do all I can to please you, Lorenza."

"Oh! you do a hundred times more than I deserve."

"You think so!"

"Yes."

"Then you confess that you have been very ill-natured?"

"Very ill-natured?—Oh, yes. But you forgive me, do you not?"

"I shall forgive you when you explain to me the strange mystery which I have sought to fathom ever since I knew you."

"It is this, Balsamo. There are in me two Lorenzas, quite distinct from each other; one that loves and one that hates you. So there are in me two lives; in one I taste all the joys of paradise, in the other experience all the torments of hell."

"And those two lives are sleep and waking?"

"Yes."

"You love me when you sleep, and you hate me when you are awake?"

"Yes."

"But why so?"

"I do not know."

"You must know."

"No."

"Search carefully; look within yourself; sound your own heart."

"Yes, I see the cause now."

"What is it?"

"When Lorenza awakes, she is the Roman girl, the superstitious daughter of Italy; she thinks science a crime, and love a sin. Her confessor told her that they were so. She is then afraid of you, and would flee from you to the confines of the earth."

"And when Lorenza sleeps?"

"Ah! then she is no longer the Roman, no longer superstitious; she is a woman. Then she reads Balsamo's heart and mind; she sees that his heart loves her, that his genius contemplates sublime things. Then she feels her littleness compared with him. Then she would live and die beside him, that the future might whisper softly the name of Lorenza, when it trumpets forth that of Cagliostro!"

"It is by that name then that I shall become celebrated?"

"Yes, by that name."

"Dear Lorenza! Then you will love this new abode, will you not?"

"It is much more splendid than any of those you have already given me, but it is not on that account that I shall love it."

"For what, then?"

"I shall love it because you have promised to live in it with me."

"Then, when you sleep, you see clearly that I love you; ardently love you?"

The young girl smiled faintly. "Yes," said she, "I do see that you love me, and yet," added she, with a sigh, "there is something which you love better than Lorenza."

"What is it?" asked Balsamo, starting.

"Your dream."

"Say, my task."

"Your ambition."

"Say, my glory."

"Ah, heaven! Ah, heaven!" and the young girl's breast heaved, while the tears forced their way through her closed eyelids.

"What do you see?" asked Balsamo, with alarm; for there were moments when her powers of seeing the unseen startled even him.

"Oh, I see darkness, and phantoms gliding through it; some of them hold in their hands their crowned heads, and you—you are among them, like a general in the thick of the battle! You command, and they obey."

"Well," said Balsamo, joyfully, "and does that not make you proud of me?"

"Oh, no, for I seek my own figure amid the throng which surrounds you, and I cannot see myself!—I shall not be there," murmured she sadly. "I shall not be there!"

"Where will you be then?"

"I shall be dead."

Balsamo shuddered.

"Dead? my Lorenza!" cried he, "dead?—no, no!—we shall live long together to love one another."

"You love me not."

"Oh, yes!"

"Ah," continued she, "I feel that I am nothing to you!"

"You, my Lorenza, nothing?—You are my all, my strength, my power,

my genius! Without you I should be nothing. You possess my whole soul—is not that enough to make you happy?"

"Happy?" repeated she, contemptuously, "do you call this life of ours happy?"

"Yes; for in my mind to be happy is to be great."

She sighed deeply.

"Oh, could you but know, dearest Lorenza, how I love to read the uncovered hearts of men, and govern them with their own passions!"

"Yes, I serve you in that, I know."

"That is not all. Your eyes read for me the hidden book of the future. What I could not learn with twenty years of toil and suffering, you, my gentle dove, innocent and pure, you teach me when you wish. Foes dog my steps, and lay snares for me—you inform me of every danger. On my understanding depend my life, my fortune, my freedom—you give that understanding the eye of the lynx, which dilates and sees clearly in the darkness. Your lovely eyes, closing to the light of this outward world, open to supernatural splendours which they watch for me. It is you who make me free, rich, powerful."

"And you in return make me wretched," she exclaimed, in a tone of despair, "for all that is not love."

"Yes, it is," he replied, "a holy and pure love."

"And what happiness attends it? Why did you force me from my country, my name, my family—why obtain this power over me—why make me your slave, if I am never to be yours in reality?"

"Alas! why, rather," asked he, "are you like an angel, infallible in penetration, by whose help I can subject the universe? Why are you able to read all hearts within their corporeal dwelling, as others read a book behind a pane of glass? It is because you are an angel of purity, Lorenza—because your spirit, different from those of the vulgar, sordid beings who surround you, pierces through every obstacle."

"And thus you regard my love less than the vain chimeras of your brain? Oh! Joseph, Joseph," added she passionately, "you wrong me cruelly!"

"Not so, for I love you; but I would raise you with myself to the throne of the world."

"Oh! Balsamo," murmured she, "will your ambition ever make you happy as my love would?"

As she spoke she threw her arms around him. He struggled to release himself, beat back the air loaded with the magnetic fluid, and at length exclaimed, "Lorenza, awake!—Awake!—It is my will."

At once her arms released their hold, the smile which had played on her lips died away, and she sighed heavily. At length her closed eyes opened; the dilated pupils assumed their natural size; she stretched out her arms, appeared overcome with weariness, and fell back at full length, but awake, on the sofa.

Balsamo, seated at a little distance from her, heaved a deep sigh. "Adieu, my dream!" murmured he to himself. "Farewell happiness!"

CHAPTER LVII.

THE DOUBLE EXISTENCE—WAKING.

As soon as Lorenza had recovered her natural powers of sight, she cast a hurried glance around her. Her eyes roamed over all the splendid trifles

which surrounded her on every side, without exhibiting any appearance of the pleasure which such things usually give to women.

At length they rested with a shudder on Balsamo, who was seated at a short distance, and was watching her attentively.

"You again!" said she, recoiling; and all the symptoms of horror appeared in her countenance. Her lips turned deadly pale, and the perspiration stood in large drops on her forehead. Balsamo did not reply.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"You know whence you come, madame," said Balsamo; "and that should naturally enable you to guess where you are."

"Yes; you are right to remind me of that;—I remember now. I know that I have been persecuted by you, pursued by you, torn by you from the arms of the royal lady whom I had chosen to protect me."

"Then you must know also, that this princess, all-powerful though she be, could not defend you?"

"Yes; you have conquered her by some work of magic!" cried Lorenza, clasping her hands. "Oh, heaven, deliver me from this demon!"

"In what way do I resemble a demon, madame?" said Balsamo, shrugging his shoulders. "Once for all, abandon, I beg of you, this farrago of childish prejudices which you brought with you from Rome; have done with all those absurd superstitions which you learned in your convent, and which have formed your constant travelling companions since you left it."

"Oh, my convent! Who will restore me my convent?" cried Lorenza, bursting into tears.

"In fact," said Balsamo, ironically, "a convent is a place very much to be regretted!"

Lorenza darted towards one of the windows, drew aside the curtains, and, opening it, stretched out her hand. It struck against a thick bar supporting an iron grating, which, although hidden by flowers, was not the less efficacious in retaining a prisoner.

"Prison for prison," said she; "I like that better which conducts towards heaven than that which sends to hell."

And she dashed her delicate hands against the iron bars.

"If you were more reasonable, Lorenza, you would find only the flowers, without the bars, at your windows."

"Was I not reasonable when you shut me up in that other moving prison, with that vampire whom you call Althotas? And yet you kept me a prisoner, you watched me like a lynx, and, whenever you left me, you breathed into me that spirit which takes possession of me, and which I cannot overcome. Where is he, that horrible old man, whose sight freezes me with terror? In some corner here, is he not? Let us keep silent, and we shall hear his unearthly voice issue from the depths of the earth."

"You really give way to your imagination like a child, madame. Althotas, my teacher, my friend, my second father, is an inoffensive old man, who has never seen or approached you; or, if he has seen you, has never paid the least attention to you, immersed as he is in his task."

"His task?" murmured Lorenza. "And what is his task, pray?"

"He is trying to discover the elixir of life—what all the greatest minds have been in search of for the last six thousand years."

"And you—what are you trying to discover?"

"The means of human perfectibility."

"Oh, demons! demons!" said Lorenza, raising her hands to heaven.

"Ah!" said Balsamo, rising, "now your fit is coming on again."

"My fit?"

"Yes; your fit. There is one thing, Lorenza, which you are not aware of; it is, that your life is divided into two equal periods. During one you are gentle, good, and reasonable; during the other you are mad."

"And it is under this false pretext of madness that you shut me up?"

"Alas! I am obliged to do so."

"Oh, be cruel, barbarous, pitiless, if you will—shut me up, kill me—but do not play the hypocrite; do not pretend to compassionate whilst you destroy me!"

"But only reflect a moment," said Balsamo, without anger, and even with a caressing smile; "is it torture to live in an elegant, commodious apartment like this?"

"Grated windows—iron bars on all sides—no air—no air."

"The bars are for the safety of your life, I repeat, Lorenza."

"Oh!" cried she, "he destroys me piecemeal, and tells me he cares for my life!"

Balsamo approached the young girl, and, with a friendly gesture, endeavoured to take her hand; but, recoiling as if from the touch of a serpent:

"Oh! do not touch me!" said she.

"Do you hate me, then, Lorenza?"

"Ask the sufferer if he hates his executioner."

"Lorenza! Lorenza! it is because I do not wish to be your executioner that I deprive you of a little of your liberty. If you could go and come as you liked, who knows what you might do in the moments of your madness?"

"What I might do? Oh, let me once be free, and you shall see what I would do!"

"Lorenza, you treat the husband whom you have chosen in the sight of heaven very strangely."

"I chose you? Never! never!"

"You are my wife, notwithstanding."

"Yes; that indeed must have been the work of the demon."

"Poor insensate!" said Balsamo, with a tender look.

"But I am a Roman woman," murmured Lorenza; "and one day I shall be revenged."

Balsamo shook his head gently.

"You only say that to frighten me, Lorenza, do you not?" said he, smiling.

"No, no; I shall do what I say."

"Woman!" exclaimed Balsamo, with a commanding voice, "you pretend to be a Christian: does not your religion teach you to render good for evil? What hypocrisy is yours, calling yourself a follower of that religion, and vowing to yourself to render evil for good!"

Lorenza appeared for an instant struck by these words. "Oh!" said she, "it is not vengeance to denounce to society its enemies; it is a duty."

"If you denounce me as a necromancer, as a sorcerer, it is not society whom I offend, but God; but if I be such, the Deity by a sign can destroy me. He does not do so. Does He leave my punishment to weak men, subject to error like myself?"

"He bears with you," murmured the young girl; "He waits for you to reform."

Balsamo smiled.

"And in the meantime," said he, "He counsels you to betray your friend, your benefactor, your husband?"

"My husband? Ah! thank heaven—your hand has never touched mine that I have not blushed or shuddered at its contact."

"O mystery! Impenetrable mystery!" murmured Balsamo to himself, replying rather to his own thoughts than to Lorenza's words.

"Once for all," said Lorenza, "why do you deprive me of my liberty?"

"Why, after having given yourself voluntarily to me, do you now wish for liberty? Why do you flee from him who protects you? Why do you ask a stranger for protection against him who loves you? Why do you threaten him who has never yet threatened you; and say you will reveal secrets which are not yours, and of which you do not comprehend the import?"

"Oh!" said Lorenza, without replying to his questions, "the prisoner who has firmly determined to be free, will be so, sooner or later, andyour bars of iron shall not keep me, any more than your moving cage kept me!"

"Fortunately for you, Lorenza, the bars are strong," answered Balsamo, with a threatening calmness.

"God will send me some storm like that of Lorraine—some thunderbolt which will break them."

"Trust me, you had better pray to heaven to avert such an occurrence. Do not give way, I advise you, to the fancies of your overheated brain, Lorenza. I speak to you as a friend."

There was such an expression of concentrated anger in Balsamo's voice, such a gloomy and threatening fire darted from his eyes, such a strange and nervous movement in his white and muscular hand, as he pronounced each word slowly and solemnly, that Lorenza, subdued in the very height of her rebellion, listened to him in spite of herself.

"You see, my child," continued he, in the same calm and threatening tone, "I have endeavoured to make this prison a habitation fit for a queen. Were you a queen, you could here want for nothing. Calm, then, this wild excitement. Live here as you would have lived in your convent. Accustom yourself to my presence; love me as a friend, as a brother. I have heavy sorrows; I shall confide them to you; I am often and deeply deceived; a smile from you will console me. The more I see you kind, attentive, patient, the more I shall lighten the rigour of your imprisonment. Who knows but that in a year, nay, in six months perhaps, you may be as free as I am, always supposing that you no longer entertain the wish to steal your freedom."

"No, no!" cried Lorenza, who could not comprehend that so terrible a resolve should be expressed in a voice so gentle; "no! More promises! More falsehoods! You have carried me off, and by violent means. I belong to myself, and to myself alone; restore me therefore to the house of God, at least, if you will not grant me my full liberty. I have until now submitted to your tyranny, because I remembered that you once saved me from robbers; but my gratitude is already weakened. A few days more of this insulting imprisonment, and it will expire; and then—take care!—I may begin to suspect that you had some secret connection with those robbers!"

"You do me the honour, then, to take me for a captain of banditti?" said Balsamo, ironically.

"I know not what you are, but I have perceived signs; I have heard strange words."

"You have perceived signs and words?" exclaimed Balsamo, turning pale.

"Yes, yes; I have intercepted them; I know them; I remember them."

"But you will never tell them to any living soul? You will shut them up in the depths of your heart?"

"Oh no!" exclaimed Lorenza, full of delight, in her anger, that she had found the vulnerable point of her antagonist, "I shall treasure them up religiously in my memory; I shall murmur them over to myself, and on the first opportunity shall say them aloud to others. I have already told them."

"To whom?"

"To the princess."

"Well, Lorenza, listen!" said Balsamo, clenching his hands till the nails entered the flesh. "If you have told them once, you shall never tell them again; never shall the words you have spoken again cross your lips, for I shall keep every door closely shut; I shall sharpen the points on those bars, and raise the walls around this house, if need be, as high as those of Babel."

"I have already told you, Balsamo," exclaimed Lorenza, "that no prison can hold a captive for ever, especially when the love of liberty is aided by hatred of the tyrant."

"Very well, leave your prison, then; but mark me, you have only twice to do so. The first time I shall chastise you so cruelly that your eyes will have no more tears to shed, the second time that your veins shall have no more blood to pour out."

"Great heavens! He will murder me!" screamed the young girl, in the highest paroxysm of fury, tearing her hair, and writhing on the carpet.

He looked at her for an instant with a mixture of anger and compassion. At length compassion seemed to prevail.

"Come, Lorenza," said he, "be calm; some future day you will be well rewarded for all you suffer now, or think you suffer."

"Imprisoned! imprisoned!" cried Lorenza, without listening to him.

"Be patient."

"Struck!"

"It is a period of probation."

"Mad! mad!"

"You shall be cured."

"Oh, put me in a madhouse at once! Shut me up at once in a real prison!"

"No; you have too well prepared me for what you would do in such a case."

"Death! then," screamed Lorenza, "instant death!" and bounding up with the suppleness and rapidity of some wild animal, she rushed forward to dash her head against the wall.

Balsamo had only to extend his hand towards her and to pronounce, by his will rather than his lips, one single word, to arrest her progress: Lorenza, checked in her wild career, staggered and fell into Balsamo's arms. —She was asleep.

The strange enchanter, who seemed to have subdued in this woman all that belonged to her physical existence, without having been able to triumph over the moral life, raised her, and carried her to her couch; then, having laid her on it, he imprinted a long kiss on her forehead, drew the curtains, and retired.

A soft and soothing sleep wrapped her in its embrace, as the mantle of a kind mother wraps the froward child after it has long suffered and wept.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE VISIT.

LORENZA was not mistaken. A carriage, after having entered Paris by the Barrière St. Denis, and traversing the faubourg of that name throughout its entire length, had turned the angle formed by the last house and the Porte St. Denis, and was rapidly advancing along the boulevard. This carriage contained Monsieur Louis de Rohan, Bishop of Strasbourg, whose impatience led him to anticipate the time fixed upon for seeking the sorcerer in his den.

The coachman, a man of mettle, and well accustomed to aid the handsome prelate in his gallant adventures amidst the darkness and perils of certain mysterious streets, was by no means discouraged, when, after having passed the boulevards of St. Denis and St. Martin, still thronged with people and well lighted, he received the order to proceed along the lonely and dismal boulevard of the Bastille. The carriage stopped at the corner of the Rue St. Claude, on the boulevard itself, and, after a whispered order from its master, took up a concealed position under the trees about twenty paces off.

Then M. de Rohan, who was dressed in the ordinary costume of a civilian, glided down the street, and knocked at the door of the house, which he easily recognised by the description of it given to him by the Count de Fenix.

Fritz's footsteps echoed in the courtyard, and the door was opened.

"Is it not here that the Count de Fenix resides?" asked the prince.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Is he at home?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Well, say that a gentleman wishes to see him."

"His highness the Cardinal de Rohan, is it not?" asked Fritz.

The prince stood perfectly confounded. He looked all around him, and at his dress, to see whether anything in his retinue or costume had revealed his rank; but he was alone, and in the dress of a layman.

"How do you know my name?" said he.

"My master has just told me this very instant that he expected your eminence."

"Yes,—but to-morrow, or the day after."

"No, monseigneur—this evening."

"Your master told you that he expected me this evening?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Very well; announce me, then," said the cardinal, putting a double louis-d'or into Fritz's hand.

"In that case," said Fritz, "will your eminence have the goodness to follow me?"

The cardinal made a gesture in the affirmative.

Fritz then advanced with a rapid step towards the ante-chamber, which was lighted by a massive bronze candelabrum, containing twelve wax tapers. The cardinal followed, surprised and thoughtful.

"My friend," said he, stopping at the door of the saloon, "there must be a mistake, I think, and in that case I do not wish to intrude on the

count. It is impossible that he can expect me, for he was not aware that I intended to come to-night."

"Monseigneur is the Prince-Cardinal de Rohan, Bishop of Strasbourg, is he not?" inquired Fritz.

"Yes, my friend."

"Well, then, it is monseigneur whom my master the count expects."

And lighting successively the candles of two other candelabra in the saloon, Fritz bowed and retired.

Five minutes elapsed, during which the cardinal, agitated by a strange emotion, gazed at the elegant furniture of this saloon, and at the eight pictures by the first masters which hung from the walls. The door opened, and the Count de Fenix appeared on the threshold.

"Good evening, my lord!" said he, simply.

"I am told that you expected me," exclaimed the cardinal, without replying to this salutation—"that you expected me this evening? It is impossible!"

"I beg your pardon, my lord, but I did expect you," replied the count. "Perhaps you doubt the truth of my words on seeing the poor reception I give you? But I have only very lately arrived in Paris, and can scarcely call myself installed here yet; your eminence must, therefore, be good enough to excuse me."

"You expected me! But who could have told you that I was coming?"

"Yourself, my lord."

"How so?"

"Did you not stop your carriage at the Barrière St. Denis?"

"Yes."

"Did you not summon your footman to the carriage-door, and give him the order, 'Rue St. Claude, in the Marais, by the Faubourg St. Denis and the boulevard'—words which he repeated to the coachman?"

"Yes, certainly; but you must have seen me and heard me."

"I did see and hear you, my lord."

"Then you were there."

"No, my lord, I was not there."

"And where were you?"

"I was here."

"You saw me and heard me from this?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Come, come!"

"Monseigneur forgets that I am a sorcerer."

"Ah, true, I did forget that! But, monsieur, what am I to call you?—The Baron Balsamo, or the Count de Fenix?"

"In my own house, my lord, I have no name: I am called THE MASTER."

"Yes, that is the hermetical title. So then, master, you expected me?"

"I did expect you."

"And your laboratory is heated?"

"My laboratory is always heated, my lord."

"And you will permit me to enter it?"

"I shall have the honour of conducting your eminence there."

"And I shall follow you, but only on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you promise not to place me personally in contact with the devil. I am terribly afraid of his majesty Lucifer."

"Oh, my lord!"

"Yes, for in general you employ for such a purpose the greatest rogues unhung—discarded soldiers of the guards, or fencing-masters without pupils, who, in order to play the part of Satan naturally, treat their dupes to sundry fillips and tweaks of the nose, after first putting out the lights."

"My lord," said Balsamo, smiling, "my devils never forget that they have the honour of dealing with princes, and ever bear in mind the Prince de Condé's speech to one of them who would not keep still, viz., that if he did not conduct himself more decently, he would so rub him down with an oaken towel that he should never need washing again."

"I am delighted to hear that you manage your imps so well. Let us proceed to the laboratory, then."

"Will your eminence have the goodness to follow me?"

"Proceed!"

CHAPTER LIX.

GOLD.

THE Cardinal de Rohan and Balsamo wound along a narrow staircase which ran parallel with the great staircase, and, like it, led to the apartments on the first floor. There, in a vaulted apartment, appeared a door which Balsamo opened, and a very gloomy corridor was disclosed to the cardinal's view, who entered it resolutely.

Balsamo closed the door behind them. At the noise which this door made in closing, the cardinal looked back with a slight feeling of trepidation.

"My lord," said Balsamo, "we have now arrived. We have but one more door to open and close; but let me warn you not to be alarmed at the sound it will make, for it is of iron."

The cardinal, who had started at the sound of the first door, was glad to be thus prepared in time, for otherwise the grating noise of its hinges and lock would have jarred disagreeably on nerves even less susceptible than his.

They descended three steps and entered the laboratory.

The first aspect of this new apartment was that of a large room with the beams and joists of the ceiling left in their original state, and containing a huge lamp with a shade, several books, and a great number of chemical and other philosophical instruments.

After a few seconds the cardinal began to feel that he breathed with difficulty.

"What is the meaning of this?" said he, "I am stifling here, master; the perspiration pours from my forehead? What noise is that?"

"Behold the cause, my lord," said Balsamo, drawing back a large curtain of asbestos cloth, and disclosing to view an immense brick furnace, in the centre of which two holes glared in the darkness like the gleaming eyes of a panther.

This furnace was situated in the middle of a second apartment, double the size of the first, which the prince had not perceived, hidden as it was by the asbestos curtain.

"Ah, ha!" cried the prince, retreating two or three steps, "that looks a little alarming."

"It is a furnace, my lord."

"Yes, but this furnace of yours has a very diabolical sort of a look. What are you cooking in it?"

"What your eminence asked from me."

"What I asked from you?"

"Yes. I think your eminence said you wished for a specimen of my handiwork. I had not intended beginning the operation till to-morrow evening, as you were not to visit me till the day following; but your eminence having changed your intention, as soon as I heard you set out for my abode, I kindled the furnace and put in the ingredients for amalgamation; so that now the furnace is boiling, and in ten minutes you will have your gold. Permit me to open this ventilator to give a current of fresh air."

"What! those crucibles on the furnace——"

"Will in ten minutes give your highness gold as pure as that of the sequins of Venice, or the florins of Tuscany."

"I should like to see it, if it is at all practicable."

"Certainly. But you must use some necessary precautions."

"What precautions?"

"Cover your face with this mask of asbestos with glass eyes; otherwise your sight might be injured by the glowing heat."

"Peste! I must take care of that. I attach a good deal of value to my eyes, and would not give them for the hundred thousand crowns which you have promised me."

"I thought so, for your eminence's eyes are very fine."

This compliment was by no means displeasing to the cardinal, who was not a little vain of his person.

"Ha!" said he, putting on his mask, "so it seems we are to see what gold is?"

"I trust, so, my lord."

"Gold, to the value of one hundred thousand crowns?"

"Yes, my lord, perhaps even a little more; for I made a very abundant mixture."

"Upon my honour, you are a most generous sorcerer," said the prince, with a joyous palpitation of the heart.

"Less so than your highness, who so kindly compliments me. In the meantime, my lord, may I beg you to keep back a little whilst I take off the lid of the crucible?"

And Balsamo, having put on a short shirt of asbestos, seized with a vigorous arm a pair of iron pincers, and raised the cover, now red hot, which revealed to view four crucibles of a similar form, some containing a mixture of a vermilion colour, others a whitish matter, although still retaining something of a purple transparent hue.

"And that is gold!" said the prelate in a half whisper, as if he feared to disturb the mystery which was being accomplished before him.

"Yes, my lord. These four crucibles contain the substance in different stages, some of them having been subject to the process twelve, others only eleven hours. The mixture—and this is a secret which I reveal only to a friend of the hermetic science—is thrown into the matter at the moment of ebullition. But, as your eminence may see, the first crucible is now at a white heat; it has reached the proper stage, and it is time to pour it out. Be good enough to keep back, my lord."

The prince obeyed with the promptitude of a soldier at the command of his captain, and Balsamo, laying aside the pincers already heated by contact with the crucibles, rolled forward to the furnace a sort of movable anvil in which were hollowed eight cylindrical moulds of equal calibre.

"What is this, my dear sorcerer?" asked the prince.

"This, my lord, is the mould in which your ingots are to be cast."

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed the cardinal, and he redoubled his attention.

Balsamo spread over the floor a thick layer of white tow as a sort of protection against accidents; then, placing himself between the furnace and the anvil, he opened a huge book, and, wand in hand, repeated a solemn incantation. This ended, he seized an enormous pair of tongs intended for grasping the weighty crucibles.

"The gold will be splendid, my lord," said he; "of the very finest quality."

"What! Are you going to lift off that flaming pot?"

"Which weighs fifty pounds? Yes, my lord; few founders, I may say it without boasting, possess my muscles and my dexterity. Fear nothing, therefore."

"But if the crucible were to break?"

"Yes, that happened with me once, my lord—in the year 1399. I was making an experiment with Nicolas Flamel, in his house in the Rue des Ecrivains, near the church of St. Jacques-la-Boucherie. Poor Flamel was nearly losing his life; and I lost twenty-seven marks of a substance even more precious than gold."

"What the devil is that you are saying, master?"

"The truth."

"Do you mean to make me believe that you pursued the *great work* in 1399, along with Nicolas Flamel?"

"Precisely so, my lord. We found out the secret together, about fifty or sixty years before, when experimenting with Pierre le Bon in the town of Pola. He did not shut up the crucible quickly enough, and I lost the use of my right eye for nearly twelve years in consequence of the evaporation."

"Pierre le Bon, who composed that famous book, the '*Margarita Pretiosa*,' printed in 1330?"

"The very same, my lord."

"And you knew Pierre le Bon and Flamel?"

"I was the pupil of the one and the teacher of the other."

And whilst the terrified prelate asked himself whether the personage at his side was not the devil in person and not one of his satellites, Balsamo plunged his long tongs into the furnace. The alchymist's grasp was sure and rapid. He seized the crucible about four inches from the top, satisfied himself, by raising it up a little, that his hold was firm; then, by a vigorous effort, which strained every muscle in his frame, he heaved up the terrible pot from the glowing furnace. The handle of the tongs turned glowing red immediately; then, rippling over the fused matter within, were seen white furrows like lightning streaking a black sulphureous cloud; then the edges of the crucible turned a brownish red, whilst the conical base appeared still rose-coloured and silver beneath the shade of the furnace; then the metal, on the surface of which had formed a violet-coloured scum, crusted here and there with gold, hissed over the mouth of the crucible, and fell flashing into the dark mould, around the top of which the golden wave, angry and foaming, seemed to insult the vile metal with which it was forced into contact.

"Now for the second," said Balsamo, seizing another crucible; and another mould was filled with the same strength and dexterity as the first. The perspiration poured from the operator's forehead; and the cardinal, standing back in the shade, crossed himself.

In fact, the scene was one of wild and majestic horror.

Balsamo, his features lighted by the reddish glare of the glowing metal,

resembled one of the damned of Michael Angelo or Dante, writhing in the depths of their flaming cauldrons ; while over all brooded the feeling of the mysterious and unknown.

Balsamo took no breathing time between the two operations ; time pressed.

"There will be a slight loss," said he, after having filled the second mould. "I have allowed the mixture to boil the hundredth part of a minute too long."

"The hundredth part of a minute !" exclaimed the cardinal, no longer seeking to conceal his stupefaction.

"It is enormous in alchymy," replied Balsamo, quietly ; "but in the meantime, your eminence, here are two crucibles emptied, and two moulds filled with one hundred pounds' weight of pure gold."

And, seizing the first mould with his powerful tongs, he plunged it into water, which hissed and bubbled around it for some time. Then he opened it and took out a lump of solid gold in the form of a sugar-loaf flattened at each extremity.

"We shall have some time to wait for the other crucibles," said Balsamo. Will your eminence in the meantime be seated, or would you prefer to breathe for a few moments a cooler atmosphere than this ?"

"And that is really gold ?" asked the cardinal, without replying to the operator's question.

Balsamo smiled. The cardinal was his.

"Do you doubt it, my lord ?"

"Why—you know—science is so often mistaken——"

"Prince, your words do not express your whole meaning," said Balsamo. "You think that I am deceiving you, and deceiving you wittingly. My lord, I should sink very low in my own opinion could I act such a part, for my ambition in that case would not extend beyond the walls of my cabinet, which you would leave filled with wonder, only to be undeceived on taking your ingot to the first goldsmith you should meet. Come, come, my lord ! Do not think so meanly of me, and be assured that, if I wished to deceive you, I should do it more adroitly, and with a higher aim. However, your eminence knows how to test gold ?"

"Certainly. By the touchstone."

"You have doubtless had occasion, my lord, to make the experiment yourself, were it only on Spanish doubloons, which are much esteemed in play because they are of the purest gold, but which, for that very reason, are frequently counterfeited."

"In fact, I have done so before now."

"Well, my lord, here are the stone and the acid."

"By no means ; I am quite convinced."

"My lord, do me the favour to assure yourself that these ingots are not only gold, but gold without alloy."

The cardinal appeared unwilling to give this proof of his incredulity, and yet it was evident that he was not convinced. Balsamo himself tested the ingots, and showed the result of the experiment to his guest.

"Twenty-eight carats," said he ; "and now I may pour out the two others."

Ten minutes afterwards the four ingots lay side by side on the tow, heated by their contact.

"Your eminence came here in a carriage, did you not ? At least when I saw you you were in one."

"Yes."

"If your lordship will order it to the door, my servant shall put the ingots into it."

"One hundred thousand crowns!" murmured the cardinal, as he took off his mask to feast his eyes on the gold lying at his feet.

"And as for this gold, your highness can tell whence it comes, having seen it made?"

"Oh, yes; I shall testify——"

"Oh, no!" said Balsamo, hastily; "*savans* are not much in favour in France! Testify nothing, my lord. If instead of making gold I made theories, then, indeed, I should have no objection."

"Then, what can I do for you!" said the prince, lifting an ingot of fifty pounds with difficulty in his delicate hands.

Balsamo looked at him steadily, and without the least respect began to laugh.

"What is there so very ludicrous in what I have said?" asked the cardinal.

"Your eminence offers me your services, I think. Would it not be much more to the purpose were I to offer mine to you?"

The cardinal's brow darkened.

"You have obliged me, sir," said he, "and I am ready to acknowledge it; but if the gratitude I am to bear you proves a heavier burden than I imagined, I shall not accept the obligation. There are still, thank Heaven, usurers enough in Paris from whom I can procure, half on some pledge and half on my bond, one hundred thousand crowns, the day after to-morrow. My episcopal ring alone is worth forty thousand livres." And the prelate held out his hand, as white as a woman's, on which shone a diamond the size of a small nut.

"Prince," said Balsamo, bowing, "it is impossible that you can for a moment imagine that I meant to offend you." Then, as if speaking to himself, he proceeded: "It is singular that the truth should always produce this effect on those who bear the title of prince."

"What mean you?"

"Your highness proposes to serve me; now I merely ask you, my lord, of what nature could those services be which your eminence proposes to render me?"

"Why, in the first place, my credit at court."

"My lord, my lord, you know too well that that credit is much shaken: in fact, I should almost as soon take the Duke de Choiseul's, and yet he has not perhaps a fortnight to hold his place. Take my word for it, prince, as far as credit goes, depend on mine. There is good and sterling gold. Every time that your eminence is in want of any, let me know the night before, and you shall have as much as you like. And with gold, my lord, cannot all things be procured?"

"Not all," murmured the cardinal, sinking into the grade of a protégé, and no longer even making an effort to regain that of patron.

"Ah! true. I forgot that your lordship desires something more than gold—something more precious than all the riches of the earth. But in this, science cannot assist you; it is the province of magic. My lord, say the word, and the alchymist is ready to become the magician."

"Thank you, sir; but I want for nothing more; I desire nothing farther," said the cardinal, in a desponding voice.

Balsamo approached him.

"My lord," said he, "a prince, young, handsome, ardent, rich, and bearing the name of Rohan, ought not to make such a reply to a magician."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because the magician reads his heart, and knows the contrary."

"I wish for nothing; I desire nothing," repeated the cardinal, almost terrified.

"I should have thought, on the contrary, that your eminence's wishes were such as you dared not avow, even to yourself, since they are those of a—king!"

"Sir," said the cardinal, with a start, "you allude, I presume, to a subject which you introduced before, when I saw you at St. Denis?"

"I confess it, my lord."

"Sir, you were mistaken then, and you are equally mistaken now."

"Do you forget, my lord, that I can read as plainly what is passing at this moment in your heart as, a short time ago, I saw your carriage enter the city, drive along the boulevard, and stop beneath the trees about fifty paces from my house."

"Then explain yourself; tell me what you mean."

"My lord, the princes of your family have always aimed at a high and daring passion; you have not degenerated from your race in that respect."

"I do not know what you mean, count," stammered the prince.

"On the contrary, you understand me perfectly. I could have touched many chords which vibrate in your heart, but why do so uselessly? I have touched the one which was necessary, and it vibrates deeply, I am certain."

The cardinal raised his head, and with a last effort at defiance met the clear and penetrating glance of Balsamo. Balsamo smiled with such an expression of superiority that the cardinal cast down his eyes.

"Oh! you are right, my lord; you are right; do not look at me, for then I read too plainly what passes in your heart—that heart, which, like a mirror, gives back the form of the objects reflected in it."

"Silence! Count de Fenix—silence!" said the cardinal, completely subdued.

"Yes, you are right; it is better to be silent, for the moment has not yet come to let such a passion be seen."

"Not yet, did you say?"

"Not yet."

"Then that love may, in some future time, bear fruit?"

"Why not?"

"And can you tell me, then, if this love be not the love of a madman, as it often seems to myself, and as it ever will seem, until I have a proof to the contrary?"

"You ask much, my lord. I can tell you nothing without being placed in contact with the person who inspires your love; or, at least, with something belonging to her person."

"What would be necessary?"

"A ringlet, however small, of her beautiful golden hair, for example."

"Yes; you are a man profoundly skilled in the human heart; you read it as I should read an open book."

"Alas! that is just what your great grand-uncle, the Chevalier Louis de Rohan, said to me when I bade him farewell on the platform of the Bastille, at the foot of the scaffold which he ascended so courageously!"

"He said that to you—that you were profoundly skilled in the human heart?"

"Yes; and that I could read it; for I had forewarned him that the Chevalier de Preault would betray him. He would not believe me, and the Chevalier de Preault did betray him."

"But what a singular analogy you draw between my ancestor and myself!" said the cardinal, turning pale in spite of himself.

"I did so merely to remind you of the necessity of being prudent, my lord, in obtaining a tress of hair whose curling locks are surmounted by a crown."

"No matter how obtained; you shall have the tress, sir."

"It is well. In the meantime, here is your gold, my lord; I hope you no longer doubt its being really gold?"

"Give me a pen and paper."

"What for, my lord?"

"To give you a receipt for the hundred thousand crowns which you are so good as to lend me."

"A receipt to me, my lord? For what purpose?"

"I borrow often, my dear count; but I tell you beforehand, I never take gifts."

"As you please, prince."

The cardinal took a pen from the table, and wrote a receipt for the money in an enormous illegible hand, and in a style of orthography which would shock a poor curate's housekeeper of the present day.

"Is that right?" asked he, as he handed it to Balsamo.

"Perfectly right," replied the count, putting it in his pocket without even looking at it.

"You have not read it, sir!"

"I have your highness's word; and the word of a Rohan is better than any pledge."

"Count de Fenix," said the cardinal, with a slight inclination, very significant from a man of his rank, "you speak like a gentleman; and if I cannot lay you under any obligation to me, I am at least fortunate in being obliged to such a man."

Balsamo bowed in his turn, and rang a bell, at the sound of which Fritz appeared.

The count spoke a few words to him in German. He stooped, and like a child carrying a handful of oranges—a little embarrassed, to be sure, but by no means oppressed with the burthen—he carried off the eight ingots wrapped up in tow.

"He is a perfect Hercules, that fellow," said the cardinal.

"He is tolerably strong, indeed, my lord; but since he has been in my service, I give him every day three drops of an elixir compounded by my learned friend, the doctor Althotas. So you see the rogue profits by it; in a year he will be able to carry a hundred weight with one hand."

"Wonderful! incomprehensible!" murmured the cardinal; "I shall never be able to resist speaking of all this!"

"Oh! speak of it by all means," replied Balsamo, laughing; "but remember that, by so doing, you bind yourself to come in person and extinguish the flame of the faggots, if by chance the parliament should take it in their heads to burn me alive in the Place de Grève."

And, having escorted his illustrious visitor to the outer gate, Balsamo took leave of him with a respectful bow.

"But I do not see your servant?" said the cardinal.

"He has gone to carry the gold to your carriage, my lord."

"Does he know where it is?"

"Under the fourth tree to the right, on the boulevard; that was what I said to him in German, my lord."

The cardinal raised his hands in astonishment, and disappeared in the darkness.

Balsamo waited for Fritz's return, and then entered the house, closing all the doors carefully behind him.

CHAPTER LX.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE.

BALSAMO being now alone, proceeded to listen at Lorenza's door. She was still sunk in a soft and gentle sleep. He half opened a wicket in the door, and contemplated her for some time in a sweet and tender reverie. Then, shutting the wicket, he crossed the apartment which we have described, and which separated Lorenza's apartment from the laboratory, and hastened to extinguish the fire in the furnace by throwing open an immense conduit, which allowed the heat to escape into the chimney, and at the same time gave passage to the water of a reservoir on the roof.

Then, carefully placing the cardinal's receipt in a black morocco case :

"The word of a Rohan is good," murmured he ; "but for myself alone ; and it is well that the brethren yonder should know how I employ their gold."

As these words died away on his lips, three short, quick taps on the ceiling made him raise his head.

"Oh, oh !" said he, "there is Althotas calling me."

Then, whilst he continued his task of giving air to the laboratory, and arranging everything in order, the taps were repeated louder than before.

"So, he is getting impatient ; it is a good sign."

And Balsamo took a long iron rod and knocked on the ceiling in answer. He then proceeded to move an iron ring fixed in the wall ; and, by means of a spring which was disclosed to view, a trap-door was detached from the ceiling and descended to the floor of the laboratory. Balsamo placed himself in the centre of this machine, which, by means of another spring, gently rose with its burthen—with as much ease as in the opera the gods and goddesses are carried up to Elysium—and the pupil found himself in the presence of the master.

The new dwelling of the old alchymist might be about eight or nine feet high and sixteen in diameter ; it was lighted from the top like a well, and hermetically closed on the four sides. This apartment, as the reader may observe, was a perfect palace when compared with his habitation in the vehicle.

The old man was seated in his arm-chair on wheels, in the centre of a marble table formed like a horse-shoe, and heaped up with a whole world, or rather a whole chaos, of plants, phials, tools, books, instruments, and papers covered with cabalistic characters.

He was so absorbed that he never raised his head when Balsamo appeared. The light of an astral lamp, suspended from the culminating point of the window in the roof, fell on his bald, shining head. He was turning to and fro in his fingers a small white bottle, the transparency of which he was trying before his eye, as a good housekeeper tries the eggs which she buys at market. Balsamo gazed on him at first in silence ; then, after a moment's pause :

"Well," said he, "have you any news ?"

"Yes, yes ; come hither, Acharat, you see me enchanted—transported with joy ! I have found—I have found——"

"What ?"

"Pardieu ! what I sought."

"Gold?"

"Gold, indeed! I am surprised at you!"

"The diamond?"

"Gold? diamonds? The man raves! A fine discovery, forsooth, to be rejoiced at!"

"Then what you have found is your elixir?"

"Yes, my son, yes!—the elixir of life! Life?—what do I say?—the eternity of life!"

"Oh!" said Balsamo, in a dejected voice (for he looked on this pursuit as mere insanity), "so it is that dream which occupies you still?"

But Althotas, without listening, continued to gaze delightedly at his phial.

"At last," said he, "the combination is complete: the elixir of Aristæus, twenty grains; balm of Mercury, fifteen grains; precipitate of gold, fifteen grains; essence of the cedar of Lebanon, twenty-five grains."

"But it seems to me, that, with the exception of the elixir of Aristæus, this is precisely your last combination, master?"

"Yes; but I had not then discovered one more ingredient, without which all the rest are as nothing."

"And have you discovered it now?"

"Yes."

"Can you procure it?"

"I should think so!"

"What is it?"

"We must add to the several ingredients already combined in this phial, the three last drops of the life-blood of an infant."

"Well, but where will you procure this infant?" said Balsamo, horror-struck.

"I trust to you for that."

"To me? You are mad, master!"

"Mad? And why?" asked the old man, perfectly unmoved at this charge, and licking with the utmost delight a drop of the fluid which had escaped from the cork of the phial and was trickling down the side.

"Why, for that purpose, you must kill the child."

"Of course, we must kill him; and the handsomer he is, the better.'

"Impossible!" said Balsamo, shrugging his shoulders; "children are not taken in that way to be killed."

"Bah!" cried the old man, with hideous coolness, "and what do they do with them, then?"

"Pardieu! They rear them."

"Oh! Then the world is changed lately? It is only three years ago since we were offered as many infants as we chose for four charges of powder and half a bottle of eau-de-vie."

"Was that in Congo, master?"

"Yes, yes, in Congo! It is quite the same to me whether the child be black or white. Those who were offered to us, I remember, were sweet, playful, curly-headed little things."

"Ah! yes," said Balsamo; "but, unfortunately, my dear master, we are not in Congo."

"Oh! we are not in Congo?" said Althotas. "And where are we, then?"

"In Paris."

"In Paris? Well, if we were to embark from Marseilles, we could be in Congo in six weeks."

"Yes, no doubt. But I am obliged to remain in France."
"You are obliged to remain in France? And why so, may I ask!"
"Because I have business here."
"Business?"
"Yes; important business."
The old man burst into a prolonged and ghastly laugh.
"Business!" said he; "business in France! True, I forgot, you have your clubs to organize!"
"Yes, master."
"Conspiracies to set on foot?"
"Yes, master."
"And you call that business?" And the aged man again commenced to laugh, with an air of mockery and sarcasm. Balsamo remained silent, collecting his forces for the storm which was brewing, and which he felt approach.
"Well, and how is this business of yours getting on?" said the old man, turning with difficulty in his chair, and fixing his large grey eyes on his pupil.
Balsamo felt his glance pierce him like a ray of light.
"How far have I advanced?" asked he.
"Yes."
"I have thrown the first stone, and the waters are troubled."
"Troubled? And what slime have you stirred up?—eh?"
"The best—the slime of philosophy."
"Oh! so you are setting to work with your Utopias, your baseless visions, your fogs and mists! Fools! Ye discuss the existence or non-existence of God, instead of trying like me to make gods of yourselves. And who are these famous philosophers with whom you are connected? Let me hear."
"I have already gained over the greatest poet and the greatest atheist of the age. He is soon expected in France, whence he has been in a manner exiled, and he is to be made a freemason at the lodge which I have established in the old monastery of the Jesuits, in the Rue Pot-de-Fer."
"What is his name?"
"Voltaire."
"I never heard of him. Well, who else have you?"
"I am very soon to have a conference with the man who has done more to overturn established ideas than any other in this age—the man who wrote 'Le Contrat Social.'"
"What is he called?"
"Rousseau."
"I never heard of him."
"Very probably, as you read only Alphonso the Tenth, Raymond Sully, Peter of Toledo, and Albertus Magnus."
"They are the only men who really lived, because all their lives they were occupied by that great question: to be, or not to be."
"There are two methods of living, master."
"I know only one, for my part, viz., to exist. But let us return to your philosophers. You called them, I think——?"
"Voltaire and Rousseau."
"Good. I shall remember those names. And you propose by means of these men——"
"To make myself master of the present, and to undermine the future."

"Then, it appears the people in this country are very stupid, since they can be led by ideas!"

"On the contrary, it is because they have too much mind that ideas have more power over them than facts. Besides, I have an auxiliary more powerful than all the philosophers on earth."

"What is that?"

"Love of change. It is now some sixteen hundred years since monarchy was established in France, and the people are wearied of it."

"So that you think they will overthrow it?"

"I am sure of it."

"And you would help them to begin the work?"

"Ay! With all my strength."

"Fool!"

"How so?"

"What will you gain by the overthrow of this monarchy?"

"I? Nothing. But the people will gain happiness."

"Come, as I am satisfied with what I have done to-day, I am willing to waste a little time on you. Explain then, first, how you are to attain to this happiness, and afterwards what happiness is."

"How I am to attain to it?"

"Yes, to this universal happiness of yours, or to the overthrow of the monarchy, which in your eyes seems to be the same thing."

"Well, there exists at this moment a ministry which is the last rampart of the monarchy, intelligent, industrious, courageous, and which might perhaps maintain this tottering and worn-out machine for twenty years longer; but they will assist me to overturn it."

"Who? Your philosophers?"

"No. The philosophers support it, on the contrary."

"What! Your philosophers support a ministry which supports a monarchy to which they themselves are hostile? What fools these philosophers of yours are!"

"It is because the prime minister is himself a philosopher."

"So! I understand—they mean to govern in the person of this minister. They are not fools, then; they are selfish."

"I do not wish to discuss what they are," exclaimed Balsamo, who began to get impatient. "All I know is, that this ministry overturned, every one will cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war on their successors. First, there will be against them the philosophers, then the parliament. The philosophers will blame, the parliament will blame; the ministry will persecute the philosophers, and will dissolve the parliament. Then both mind and matter will combine, and organize a silent league—an opposition, obstinate, tenacious, incessant, which will attack, undermine, shake all. Instead of parliaments, judges will be appointed; these judges, nominated by the king, will move heaven and earth in defence of royalty. They will be accused, and with truth, of venality, of connivance, of injustice. The nation will arise, and then the monarchy will have against it the philosophers—that is, mind; the parliaments—that is, the middle class; the people—that is the lever, which Archimedes sought, and with which he could have raised the world."

"Well, when you have raised the world, you can only let it fall back again into its old place."

"Yes; but in falling back it will crush the monarchy to atoms."

"And when the monarchy is crushed to atoms—to adopt your false metaphors and inflated language—what will arise on its ruins?"

"Liberty!"

"Ah! the French will then be free?"

"They cannot fail to be so soon."

"All free?"

"All."

"There will then be in France thirty millions of free men?"

"Yes."

"And among those thirty millions of free men, has it never occurred to you that there might be one, with a little more brains than the rest, who, some fine morning, will seize on the liberty of the twenty-nine millions nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine, in order that he might have a little more liberty himself? You remember that dog we had at Medina, who ate up what was intended for all the other dogs?"

"Yes; but you may remember also, that one day the others combined together and strangled him."

"Because they were dogs; in such a case men would have done nothing."

"Then you place man's intelligence below that of the dog, master?"

"All examples prove it."

"What examples?"

"I think you may recall among the ancients a certain Cæsar Augustus, and among the moderns a certain Oliver Cromwell, who bit rather deeply into the Roman cake and the English cake, without any great resistance having been offered by those from whom they snatched it."

"Well; and supposing that the man of whom you speak should arise, he will be mortal, he will die; and before dying he will have done good even to those whom he may have oppressed; for he will have changed the nature of the aristocracy. Being obliged to lean for support on something, he will choose that which is strongest—the people. Instead of an equality which degrades, he will establish an equality which elevates: for equality has no fixed range; it adapts itself to the level of him who makes it. Now, in elevating the people in the social scale, he will have introduced a principle unknown until his time. A revolution will make the French free; a protectorate under another Cæsar Augustus, or another Oliver Cromwell, will make them equal."

Althotas wheeled round in his arm-chair.

"Oh, the stupidity of man!" he cried. "Busy yourself for twenty years in educating a child—teach him all that you know—that at thirty he may come and tell you—'Men will be equal!'"

"Certainly, men will be equal—equal before the law."

"And before death, fool?—before death, that law of laws, will they be equal, when one shall die at three days old and another at one hundred years? Equal? Men equal as long as they are subject to death?—Oh, fool! Thrice sodden fool!"

And Althotas threw himself back in his chair to laugh at his ease, whilst Balsamo, grave and sad, sat with his head leaning on his hand.

The old man at length turned a look of pity on him.

"Am I," said he, "the equal of the workman who munches his coarse bread? of the sucking babe? of the drivelling old man sunk in second childhood? Wretched sophist that you are! Men can be equal only when they are immortal; for, when immortal, they will be gods, and gods alone are on an equality with one another."

"Immortal!" murmured Balsamo. "Immortal!—'Tis a chimera."

"A chimera? Yes; a chimera like steam—a chimera like the electric

fluid—a chimera like everything which is sought—which is not yet discovered—but which will be discovered. Rake up the dust of by-gone worlds, lay bare one after another the superincumbent strata, each of which represents a social state now passed away; and in these human strata—in this detritus of kingdoms—in these slimy deposits of time, into which modern investigation has pierced like an iron ploughshare—what do you read? Is it not that men have, in all ages, sought what I seek, under the various names of the highest good, human happiness, perfection? When did they not seek it? They sought it in the days of Homer, when men lived two hundred years—they sought it in the days of the patriarchs, when they lived eight centuries. They did not find that highest good—that well-being—that perfection; for, if they had, this decrepid world would now be fresh, youthful, roseate as the morning dawn. Instead of that we have suffering, death, decay. Is suffering good? Is death lovely? Is decay fair to look upon?"

Here the old man was interrupted by his short, dry cough, and Balsamo had a moment to reply.

"You acknowledge," said he, "that no one has yet discovered that elixir of life which you seek. I tell you that no one will ever discover it. Submit to God."

"Fool! No one has discovered it, therefore no one will discover it! By that mode of reasoning we should never have made any discoveries. But do you think that all discoveries are new things, inventions? Far from it; they are forgotten things found again. Why should things, once found, be forgotten? Because life is too short for the discoverer to draw from his discovery all the deductions which belong to it. Twenty times has man been on the point of grasping the elixir of life. Do you think that the Styx was merely a dream of Homer's? Do you think that Achilles, almost immortal, because vulnerable in his heel alone, was a fable? No; Achilles was the pupil of Chiron, as you are my pupil. That word Chiron means either best or worst. Chiron was a sage whom they have depicted as a Centaur, because by his learning he had endowed man with the strength and swiftness of the horse. Well, like me, he had almost found the elixir of immortality. Perhaps, like me, he wanted only three drops of blood. The want of those three drops of blood rendered Achilles vulnerable in his heel; death found a passage—it entered. Well, what have you to say to that?"

"I say," replied Balsamo, visibly shaken, "that I have my task and you have yours; let each fulfil his own at his own personal risk and danger. I will not second yours by a crime."

"By a crime?"

"Yes; and by such a crime as would raise a whole people with cries of indignation in pursuit of you—a crime which would cause you to hang on one of those infamous gibbets from which your science has not secured the best men any more than the worst."

Althotas struck the marble table with his dry and fleshless hands. "Come!" said he, "be not a humane idiot—the worst race of idiots which exist in the world! Let us just converse a little on these laws of yours—these brutal and absurd laws, written by animals of your species who shudder at a drop of blood shed for a wise purpose, but gloat over torrents of the vital fluid shed on scaffolds, before the ramparts of cities, or on those plains which they call fields of battle! Your laws, ignorant and selfish, sacrificing the future generation to the present, and which have taken for their motto: 'Live to-day; for to-morrow we die!' Let us speak of them, I say."

"Say what you have to say—I am listening," said Balsamo, becoming more and more gloomy.

"Have you a pencil? I wish you to make a little calculation."

"I can calculate without pen or pencil—proceed with what you have to say."

"What was this that your project was? Oh! I remember. You are to overturn a ministry, dissolve the parliament, establish venal judges, cause a national bankruptcy, stir up rebellion, kindle a revolution, overturn the monarchy, raise up a protectorate, and hurl down the protector. The revolution is to bring freedom—the protectorship equality. Then, the French being free and equal, your task will be accomplished? Is not that it?"

"Yes; do you look on the thing as impossible?"

"I do not believe in impossibility. You see I play fairly with you."

"Well, what then?"

"In the first place, France is not England, where what you wish to do has already been done—plagiarist that you are! France is not an isolated land, where ministers may be dismissed, parliaments dissolved, iniquitous judges established, bankruptcy brought about, revolt fomented, revolution kindled, the monarchy overturned, a protectorship established, and the protector then overthrown, without other nations interfering a little in these movements. France is soldered to Europe as the liver to the frame of man. It has roots in all nations; its fibres extend through every people. Try to tear up the liver of this great machine which is called the European continent, and for twenty, thirty, forty years perhaps, the whole body will quiver. But I shall take the lowest number, I shall say twenty years. Is that too much, oh sage philosopher?"

"No, it is not too much," said Balsamo; "it is not even enough."

"However, I am satisfied with it. Twenty years of war, of a bloody, mortal, incessant strife—let me see—I put down that at two hundred thousand dead each year. That is not too high a calculation, considering that there will be fighting at the same time in Germany, Italy, Spain, and heaven knows where else! Two hundred thousand men a year, in twenty years make four millions. Allowing each man seventeen pounds of blood, which is nearly the natural quantity, that will make—seventeen multiplied by four—let me see—that will make sixty-eight millions of pounds of blood, shed for the attainment of your object. I, for my part, ask but three drops! Say, now, which of us is mad?—which of us is the savage?—which of us the cannibal? Well, you do not answer?"

"Yes, master, I do answer, that three drops of blood would be nothing were you sure of success."

"And you, who would shed sixty-eight millions of pounds, are you sure of success? Speak? If you be sure, lay your hand on your heart and say, 'Master, for these four millions of dead I guarantee the happiness of the human race!'"

"Master," said Balsamo, evading a direct reply, "in the name of heaven seek for some other means than this!"

"Ah, you dare not answer me! You dare not answer me!" exclaimed Althotas, triumphantly.

"You are deceived, master, about the efficacy of the means—it is impossible."

"Ay? So you give advice, so you contradict me, so you give me the lie, do you?" said Althotas, rolling his grey eyes from beneath his white and shaggy eyebrows with an expression of concentrated anger.

"No, master—but I cannot help reflecting on the difficulties in your way—I, who am brought every day into contact with the world, in opposition to men—who have to struggle against princes, and who do not live like you, secluded in a corner, indifferent to all that passes around you, and careless whether your actions are forbidden or authorised by the laws—a pure abstraction, in short, of the savant and the scholar. I, in short, who see the difficulties, warn you of them. That is all."

"You could easily set aside all those difficulties if you chose."

"Say rather if I believed that you were in the right."

"You do not believe so, then?"

"No," said Balsamo.

"You are only tempting me!" cried Althotas.

"No, I merely express my doubts."

"Well—come; do you believe in death?"

"I believe in what *is*. Now death *is*."

Althotas shrugged his shoulders.

"Death *is*," continued Balsamo; "that is one point which you will not contest."

"No, it is incontestable. It is omnipresent, invincible, too—is it not?" added the old man with a smile which made his adept shudder.

"Oh, yes, master; omnipresent, and, above all, invincible!"

"And when you see a corpse, the cold sweat bedews your forehead, regret pierces your heart?"

"No—the cold sweat does not bedew my forehead, because I am familiar with every form of human misery; grief does not pierce my heart, because I attach little value to life. I only say in the presence of a corpse; 'Death! death! thou art as powerful as God. Thou reignest as a sovereign, O death, and none can prevail against thee!'"

Althotas listened to Balsamo in silence, giving no other sign of impatience than that of turning a scalpel eagerly in his fingers; but when the pupil had ended his painful and solemn invocation, the master looked around him with a smile, and his piercing eyes, which seemed to penetrate nature's most hidden secrets, rested on a poor black dog, which lay trembling in a corner of the room on a little heap of straw. It was the last of three animals of the same species which Althotas had demanded for his experiments, and which Balsamo had procured for him.

"Take that dog," said Althotas, "and place it on the table."

Balsamo obeyed.

The creature, which seemed to have a presentiment of its fate, and which had, no doubt, already been in the hands of the experimenter, began to tremble, struggle, and howl, as soon as it felt the contact of the marble table.

"And so," said Althotas, "you believe in life, do you not, since you believe in death?"

"Certainly."

"There is a dog which appears to me quite alive. What do you think?"

"He is alive, assuredly, because he howls, struggles, is terrified."

"How ugly black dogs are! By-the-bye, remember the first opportunity to get me some white ones."

"I will endeavour to do so."

"Well, you say this one is alive? Bark, my little fellow, bark!" said the old man, with his frightful laugh, "we must convince my Lord Acharat that you are alive." And he touched the dog on a certain muscle, which made him bark or rather howl immediately.

"Very well; now bring forward the air-pump, and put the dog under the receiver. But I forgot to ask you in which death you have the firmest belief."

"I do not know what you mean, master; death is death."

"Very just; that is my opinion also. Then, since death is death, make a vacuum, Acharat."

Balsamo turned a handle, and the air which was enclosed with the dog in the receiver rushed out by means of a tube with a sharp whistling sound. The little dog seemed at first restless, then looked around, snuffed the air uneasily, raised its head, breathed noisily and hurriedly, and at last sunk down—suffocated, swollen, senseless.

"Now, the dog is dead of apoplexy, is he not?" said Althotas; "a very good kind of death, as it does not cause much suffering."

"Yes."

"Is he really dead?"

"Certainly he is."

"You do not seem quite convinced, Acharat."

"Yes, I assure you I am."

"Oh, you know my resources, do you not? You suppose that I have discovered the art of insufflation, do you not?—that other problem which consists in restoring life by making the vital air circulate in a body which has not been wounded, as in a bladder which has not been pierced?"

"No; I suppose nothing. I simply believe that the dog is dead."

"However, for greater security, we shall kill him twice. Lift up the receiver, Acharat."

Acharat raised the glass shade. The dog did not stir; his eyelids were closed, and his heart had ceased to beat.

"Take this scalpel, and without wounding the larynx, divide the vertebral column."

"I do so only to satisfy you."

"And also to put an end to the poor animal in case it should not be quite dead," replied Althotas, smiling with that kind of obstinate pertinacity peculiar to the aged.

Balsamo made an incision with the keen blade, which divided the vertebral column about two inches below the brain, and laid bare a large bloody wound. The animal, or rather the dead body of the animal, remained motionless.

"Ha! by my faith, he was quite dead," said Althotas. "See! not a fibre moves, not a muscle stirs, not one atom of his flesh recoils at this second attempt."

"I shall acknowledge all that as often as you like," said Balsamo, impatiently.

"Then you are certain that you behold an animal, inert, cold, for ever incapable of motion. Nothing can prevail against death, you say. No power can restore life, or even the semblance of life to this poor creature?"

"No power, except that of God."

"Yes, but God turns not aside from his established laws. When God kills, as He is supreme wisdom, He has a reason for doing so; some benefit is to result from it. An assassin, I forget his name, said that once, and it was well said. Nature has an interest in Death. Then you see before you a dog as dead as it is possible to be. Nature has taken possession of her rights over him."

Althotas fixed his piercing eye on Balsamo, who, wearied by the old man's dotage, only bowed in reply.

"Well," continued Althotas, "what would you say if this dog opened his eye and looked at you?"

"I should be very much surprised, master."

"You would be surprised? Ha! I am delighted to hear it." On uttering these words with his dreary hollow laugh, the old man drew near the dog a machine composed of plates of metal separated by dampers of cloths; the centre of this apparatus was swimming in a mixture of acidulated water; the two extremities, or poles, as they are called, projected from the trough.

"Which eye do you wish him to open, Acharat?" asked the old man.

"The right."

He placed the two poles of the machine in juxtaposition, separated, however, from each other by a small piece of silk, and fixed them on a muscle in the neck. Instantly the dog opened the right eye and looked steadily at Balsamo, who recoiled with horror.

"Shall we now pass to the jaws?" said Althotas.

Balsamo made no reply; he was overpowered with astonishment.

Another muscle was touched; and, the eye having closed, the jaws opened, showing the sharp white teeth, and below them the gums red and quivering apparently with life.

"This is, in truth, strange!" murmured Balsamo, unable to conceal his agitation.

"You see that death is not so powerful after all," said Althotas, triumphing at the discomfiture of his pupil, "since a poor old man like me, who must soon be its prey, can turn it—the inexorable one—from its path." Then, with a sharp ringing laugh, he suddenly added: "Take care, Acharat, the dog who just now seemed as if he would bite you, is going to give you chase. Take care!"

And, in fact, the dog with its neck laid open, its gaping mouth, and quivering eye, rose suddenly on its four legs, and staggered for a moment, its head hanging down hideously. Balsamo felt his hair stand on end, and he recoiled to the wall of the apartment, uncertain whether to fly or remain.

"Come, come, I do not wish to kill you with fright in trying to instruct you," said Althotas, pushing aside the dead body and the machine. "Enough of experiments like that."

Immediately the body, ceasing to be in contact with the battery, fell down, stiff and motionless as before.

"Could you have believed that of death, Acharat? Did you think it so kindly disposed?"

"It is strange, in truth—very strange!" replied Balsamo, drawing nearer.

"You see, my child, that we may arrive at what I seek, for the first step towards it is made. What is it to prolong life, when we have already succeeded in annihilating death?"

"But we must not assume that yet," objected Balsamo; "for the life which you have just restored is only factitious."

"With time we shall discover the real life. Have you not read in the Roman poets that Cassidæus restored life to dead bodies?"

"Yes; in the works of the poets."

"Do not forget, my friend, that the Romans called poets *vates*."

"But I have still an objection to offer."

"Let me hear it! Let me hear it!"

"If your elixir of life were made, and if you caused this dog to swallow some of it, he would live eternally?"

"Without doubt."

"But suppose he fell into the hands of an experimenter like you, who cut his throat—what then?"

"Good! good!" cried the old man, joyfully, and rubbing his hands together; "this is what I expected from you."

"Well, if you expected it, reply to it."

"I ask no better."

"Will your elixir prevent a chimney from falling on a man's head, a pistol-ball from going through his heart, a horse from giving him a kick that shall destroy him?"

Althotas looked at Balsamo with the eye of a bravo who feels that he has exposed himself to his adversary's blow.

"No, no, no!" said he; "you are a real logician, my dear Acharat. No, I cannot prevent the effects of the chimney, or of the ball, or of the horse, whilst there are houses, firearms, and horses."

"However, you can bring the dead to life?"

"Why, yes—for a moment—not for an indefinite period. In order to do that I must first discover the spot where the soul is lodged, and that may be rather tedious—but I can prevent the soul from leaving the body by a wound."

"How so?"

"By causing the wound to close up."

"Even if an artery be divided."

"Certainly."

"Ah! I should like to see that done."

"Very well, look!" And before Balsamo could prevent him, the old man opened a vein in his left arm with a lancet. There was so little blood in his body, and it circulated so slowly that it was some time before it issued from the wound, but at last it did flow abundantly.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Balsamo.

"Well, what is the matter?" said Althotas.

"You have wounded yourself seriously."

"That is because you are so sceptical; you must see and touch before you will believe."

He then took a little phial which he had placed near him, and poured a few drops of its contents on the wound.

"Look!" said he.

At the touch of this magic fluid the blood ceased to flow, the flesh contracted, closing up the vein, and the wound became merely like the prick of a pin, too small an opening for the vital stream to issue from.

This time Balsamo gazed at the old man in amazement.

"That is another of my discoveries, Acharat. What do you think of it?"

"Oh, master, you are the most learned of men."

"Yes, acknowledge that if I have not conquered death, I have at least dealt it a blow from which it will not readily recover. The bones of the human body are easily broken; I shall render them, my son, as hard as steel. It has blood, which when it is shed carries life along with it. I shall prevent the blood from leaving the body. The flesh is soft and can be pierced without difficulty; I shall make it invulnerable as that of the paladins of the middle ages, which blunted the edge of swords and axes. But to do all that it requires an Althotas who shall live three hundred years. Well, give me then what I ask, and I shall live one thousand! Oh, my dear Acharat, all depends on you! Give me back my youth! give me back the vigour of my body; give me back the freshness of my ideas;

and you shall see whether I fear the sword, the ball, the tottering wall, or the stupid beast which bites or kicks. In my fourth youth, Acharat, that is, before I have lived to the age of four men, I tell you I shall have renewed the face of the world—I shall have made for myself and for a regenerated race of men a new world, without falling chimneys, without swords, without musket-balls, without kicking horses; for men will then understand that it is better to live to help and love one another than to tear each other to pieces, and to destroy each other."

"It is true, master; or, at least, it is possible."

"Well, bring me the child, then."

"Give me time to reflect on the matter, and reflect on it yourself."

Althotas darted on his adept a glance of sovereign scorn.

"Go," said he, "go! I shall yet convince you that I am right. And, in truth, the blood of man is not so precious an ingredient that a substitute for it may not be found. Go! I shall seek—I shall find. Go! I need you not."

Balsamo struck the trap-door with his foot, and descended into the lower apartment, mute, melancholy, and wholly subdued by the genius of this man, who compelled him to believe in impossibilities, by accomplishing them before his eyes.

CHAPTER LXI.

INQUIRIES.

THIS night, so long and so fertile in events, during which we have been borne about, as in the cloud of the mythological deities, from St. Denis to Muette, from Muette to the Rue Coq-Heron, from the Rue Coq-Heron to the Rue Plastrière, and from thence to the Rue St. Claude, had been employed by Madame Dubarry in efforts to bend the king's mind to her new political views. She insisted in particular on the danger there would be in allowing the Choiseuls to gain ground with the dauphiness.

The king replied to this with a shrug, "That the dauphiness was a child, and the Duke de Choiseul was an elderly minister, and that consequently there was no danger, seeing that he could not amuse her, and she would not understand him." Then, enchanted with this bon mot, the king cut short all further explanations.

But if the king was enchanted, the countess was far from being so, as she thought she perceived symptoms of his majesty's throwing off her yoke.

Louis XV. was a male coquet. His greatest happiness consisted in his making his mistresses jealous, providing always that their jealousy did not assume the form of obstinate quarrels and prolonged sulkiness.

Madame Dubarry was jealous; in the first place from vanity, secondly, from fear. It had cost her too much pains to attain her present elevated position, and it was too far removed from her point of departure, for her to dare, like Madame de Pompadour, to tolerate other favourites near the king. Madame Dubarry, then, being jealous, was determined to probe to the bottom this sudden change in the king's manner.

The king replied to her in these memorable words, in which there was not one particle of truth:—"I am thinking very seriously about the happiness of my daughter-in-law; I really do not know whether the dauphin will make her happy or not."

"Why not, sire?"

"Because Louis, at Compiègne, St. Denis, and Muette, seemed to me much more occupied with any other woman than his own wife."

"In truth, sire, if your majesty had not told me this yourself, I should not have believed it; for the dauphiness is lovely."

"She is rather thin."

"She is so young."

"Oh, as for that, look at Mademoiselle de Taverney; she is the same age as the arch-duchess!"

"Well, sire?"

"Well, she is a faultless beauty."

A flash from the countess's eye warned the king of his mistake.

"And you yourself, dear countess," added he, quickly, "you yourself, at sixteen, were as round as one of our friend Boucher's shepherdesses, I am sure."

This little bit of adulation smoothed matters in some degree, but the blow had taken effect. Madame Dubarry therefore assumed the offensive.

"Ah!" said she, bridling, "so she is very handsome, this Mademoiselle de Taverney?"

"Handsome! How should I know?" replied the king.

"What? You praise her, and yet you do not know, you say, whether she is handsome or not?"

"I know that she is not thin, that is all."

"Then you have seen her, and looked rather narrowly at her?"

"Ah! my dear countess, you push me rather closely. You know that I am short-sighted; a mass strikes me, but deuce take the details! In looking at the dauphiness, I saw bones and nothing more."

"And in looking at Mademoiselle de Taverney you saw masses, to use your own expression; for the dauphiness is an aristocratic beauty, Mademoiselle de Taverney a vulgar one."

"Oh, ho!" said the king, "by this mode of reckoning, Jeanne, you will never be an aristocratic beauty! Come, you must be jesting, I think."

"Very good; a compliment!" thought the countess to herself. "Unfortunately this compliment only serves as the outer covering of another compliment which is not intended for me." Then aloud:

"On my honour," said she, "I shall be very glad if her royal highness the dauphiness chooses for her ladies of honour those that are a little attractive; a court of old women is frightful."

"My fairest one, you need not tell that to me. I said the same thing to the dauphin yesterday; but our newly fledged husband seems quite indifferent about the matter."

"And suppose for a beginning she were to take this Mademoiselle de Taverney?"

"I think she has already chosen her," replied Louis.

"Ah! you know that, sire?"

"At least, I fancy I heard some one say so."

"She has no fortune, I hear."

"No, but she is of an old family. The Taverneys-Maison-Rouge are of ancient descent, and have served the state honourably."

"Who patronises them?"

"I have no idea. But I think they are beggars, as you say."

"In that case it cannot be the Duke de Choiseul; otherwise they would actually burst with pensions."

"Countess, countess, I beseech you, no politics!"

"Do you call it politics to say that the Choiseuls are robbing you?"

"Certainly it is," said the king, rising.

An hour afterwards, the king arrived at the great Trianon, delighted at having awakened the countess's jealousy, but repeating to himself, in a half-whisper, as the Duke de Richelieu might have done at thirty, "Really, jealous women are very tiresome!"

No sooner had his majesty left Madame Dubarry, than she also rose and passed into her boudoir, where Chon awaited her, impatient to hear the news.

"Well!" said she, "your star has been in the ascendant these last few days—presented to the dauphiness the day before yesterday—invited to her table yesterday!"

"A great triumph, truly!"

"What! Do you speak in that tone? Are you aware that, at this moment, a hundred carriages are hastening to Luciennes, that their occupants may obtain a smile from you?"

"I am sorry to hear it."

"Why so?"

"Because they are losing their time. Neither the carriages nor their owners shall have a smile from me this morning."

"Ah! this is a cloudy morning, then, countess?"

"Yes; very cloudy! My chocolate, quick—my chocolate!"

Chon rang the bell, and Zamore appeared.

"My chocolate!" said the countess.

Zamore retired, walking very slowly and with a most majestic strut.

"The wretch intends that I should die of hunger!" cried the countess. "A hundred blows of the whip if you do not run."

"Me not run—me governor," said Zamore majestically.

"Ah! You governor?" exclaimed the countess, seizing a little riding-whip with a silver handle, which she used for keeping peace among the spaniels and monkeys; "governor, indeed! Wait, governor, and you shall see!"

At this spectacle Zamore took to flight, slamming the doors behind him and uttering loud cries.

"Really, Jeanne, you are perfectly ferocious to-day," said Chon.

"I am at liberty to be so if I please, am I not?"

"Oh, very well; but in that case you must permit me to leave you, my dear!"

"Why so?"

"I am afraid of being devoured."

Three taps were heard at the door.

"Well, who is knocking now?" said the countess impatiently.

"Whoever he is, he will get a warm reception," muttered Chon.

"Oh! I should advise you to give me a bad reception," said Jean, throwing open the door with a majestic air.

"Well, and what would happen if you were ill received? For, after all, the thing is possible."

"It would happen," said Jean, "that I should never come back."

"Well?"

"And that you would lose a great deal more than I should by receiving me badly."

"Impertinent fellow!"

"Ah! I am impertinent, because I do not flatter. What is the matter with her this morning, Chon, my beauty?"

"Don't speak to me about her, Jean. She is perfectly insufferable. Oh, here is the chocolate."

"Oh, well, never mind her, then. How do you do, chocolate? I am very glad to see you, my dear chocolate!' continued Jean, taking the tray from the servant, placing it on a little table in the corner, and seating himself before it.

"Come, Chon—come!" said he; "those who are too proud to speak shall not have any."

"You are quite delightful, you two!" said the countess, seeing that Chon by a sign gave Jean to understand that he might breakfast alone. "You pretend to be hurt, and yet you do not see that I am suffering."

"What is the matter, then?" said Chon, approaching her.

"No!" exclaimed the countess, pettishly. "Neither of them bestow a thought on what torments me."

"And what does torment you?" asked Jean, coolly cutting a slice of bread and butter.

"Do you want money?" asked Chon.

"Oh! as for money, the king shall want before I."

"I wish you would lend me a thousand louis-d'-ors, then," said Jean; "I require them very much."

"A thousand fillips on your great red nose!"

"The king has positively decided on keeping that abominable Choiseul, then?" asked Chon.

"Great news that! You know very well that the Choiseuls are immovable."

"Then the king has fallen in love with the dauphiness."

"Now you are coming nearer it. But look at that beast stuffing himself with chocolate! He would not move his little finger to save me from destruction. Oh, those two creatures will be the death of me!"

Jean, without paying the least attention to the storm which was raging behind him, cut a second slice, buttered it carefully, and poured out another cup of chocolate.

"How! The king is really in love?" cried Chon, clasping her hands and turning pale.

Madame Dubarry nodded, as much as to say, "You have hit it."

"Oh! if it be so, we are lost!" continued Chon; "and will you suffer that, Jeanne? But whom has he fancied?"

"Ask your brother there, who is purple with chocolate, and who looks as if he was just going to burst. He will tell you, for he knows, or at least he suspects."

Jean raised his head.

"Did you speak?" said he.

"Yes, most obliging brother!—most useful ally!" said Jeanne, "I was asking you the name of the person whom the king has fancied."

Jean's mouth was so well filled that it was with great difficulty he sputtered out, "Mademoiselle de Taverney."

"Mademoiselle de Taverney! Oh, mercy on us!" cried Chon.

"He knows it, the wretch!" shrieked the countess, throwing herself back in her chair, and clasping her hands—"he knows it, and he eats!"

"Oh!" said Chon, visibly deserting from her brother's camp to enter that of her sister.

"I wonder," cried the countess, "what prevents me from tearing out his two great ugly eyes! Look at them, all swollen with sleep, the lazy wretch! He has just got up, my dear, just got up!"

"You are mistaken," said Jean, "I have not been in bed at all."

"And what were you doing, then, you glutton?"

"Why, faith, I have been running up and down all night and all morning, too."

"I told you so. Oh, who is better served than I am? No one—no one to tell me where that girl is!"

"Where she is?" asked Jean.

"Yes."

"Where should she be but in Paris?"

"In Paris? But whereabouts in Paris?"

"Rue Coq-Heron."

"Who told you so?"

"The coachman who drove her; I waited for him at the stables and questioned him."

"He told you——"

"That he had just driven the entire Taverney family to a little hotel in the Rue Coq-Heron, situated in a garden adjoining the Hotel D'Armenonville."

"Oh, Jean, Jean!" cried the countess, "this reconciles me to you, my dear. But now what we want is to know the particulars. How she lives? Whom she sees? What she does? Does she receive any letters? These are the important points."

"Well, you shall know all that."

"But how? But how?"

"Ah! Just so. Now try to find out how yourself. I have found out a great deal for my share."

"Oh," said Chon, "there might be lodgings to let in the Rue Coq-Heron."

"An excellent idea!" exclaimed the countess. "You must hasten to the Rue Coq-Heron, Jean, and hire a house. We will conceal some one there who can see every one that goes in or comes out. We shall know all. Quick! Order the carriage."

"It is useless—there is neither house nor lodging to be let in that street."

"How do you know?"

"Faith, in the surest way that one can know!—I have inquired; but there are apartments——"

"Where—where?"

"In the Rue Plastrière."

"And where is the Rue Plastrière?"

"It is a street whose rear looks toward the garden of the hotel."

"Well! quick, quick!" said the countess, "let us hire an apartment in the Rue Plastrière."

"It is already hired," said Jean.

"Admirable man!" cried the countess; "kiss me, Jean."

Jean wiped his mouth, kissed Madame Dubarry on both cheeks, and then made a ceremonious bow of thanks for the honour that had been done him.

"Was it not luck?" said he.

"But I hope no one recognised you?"

"Who the devil should recognise me in a street like that?"

"And what have you engaged!"

"A little apartment in an obscure out-of-the-way house."

"But they must have asked for whom?"

"Certainly they did."

"And what did you say?"

"That it was for a young widow—are you a widow, Chon?"

"Of course I am!" said Chon.

"Excellent!" said the countess. "Then it is Chon who shall be installed in the apartment; she will watch, she will spy—but not a moment must be lost."

"Therefore I shall set off at once," said Chon. "The carriage! the carriage!"

"The carriage!" repeated Madame Dubarry, ringing loud enough to have awakened the whole household of the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood.

Jean and the countess knew perfectly what they had to dread from Andrée's presence. She had, even on her first appearance, attracted the king's attention, therefore she was dangerous.

"This girl," said the countess, whilst the horses were being put to, "is not a true provincial if she have not brought some rustic lover with her from her dove-cot at Taverney; let us but discover the swain, and patch up a marriage at once. Nothing would cool the king like a marriage between country lovers."

"Oh, the devil! I am not quite so sure of that," said Jean; "I rather distrust his most Christian majesty. But the carriage is ready."

Chon sprang into it after having embraced her sister and pressed Jean's hand.

"But why not take Jean?" asked the countess.

"No, no; I shall go my own way," replied Jean. "Wait for me in the Rue Plastrière; I shall be your first visitor in your new domicile."

Chon drove off. Jean seated himself at his table again, and poured out a third cup of chocolate.

Chon called first at the family residence, and changed her dress, studying as much as possible to assume the costume and appearance of a tradesman's wife. Then, when she was satisfied with her labours, she threw over her aristocratic shoulders a meagre black silk mantle; ordered a sedan chair to the door, and about half an hour afterwards, she and Sylvie were mounting the steep narrow staircase leading up to the fourth story of a house in the Rue Plastrière. For in a fourth story was situated that lodging so fortunately procured by the viscount.

When she reached the landing of the second story, Chon turned, for she heard some one following her. It was the old proprietress of the house, who lived on the first floor, and who, hearing a noise, had come out to see what caused it, and was rather puzzled at beholding two women, so young and pretty, enter her abode. Raising her snappish countenance to the landing above her, her gaze was met by two faces whose smiling expression formed a strong contrast to her own.

"Stop, ladies, stop!" cried she; "what do you want here?"

"The lodging which my brother was to engage for us, ma'am," said Chon, assuming the serious air of a widow. "Have you not seen him, or can we have made a mistake in the house?"

"Oh no," replied the old proprietress; "you are quite right; it is on the fourth story. Poor young creature! A widow at your age!"

"Alas! alas!" sighed Chon, raising her eyes to heaven.

"But do not grieve; you will be very pleasantly situated in the Rue Plastrière. It is a charming street; you will hear no noise, and your apartment looks into the gardens."

"That is just what I wished, ma'am."

"And besides, by means of the corridor, you can see into the street when any procession is passing, or when the learned dogs are exhibited."

"Thank you; that will be a great relief to me," sighed Chon, and she continued to ascend.

The old proprietress followed her with her eyes until she reached the fourth story. Then Chon, after shutting the door, hurried to the window which looked on the garden.

Jean had committed no mistake; almost immediately below the window of the apartment which he had engaged was the garden pavilion which the coachman had described to him.

Soon, however, all doubts were removed; a young girl came forward to the window of the pavilion, and seated herself before a little embroidery frame. It was Andrée.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE APARTMENT IN THE RUE PLASTRIERE.

CHON had not scrutinised the young girl many seconds, before Viscount Jean, ascending the stairs four at a time, like a lawyer's-clerk, appeared on the threshold of the pretended widow's apartment. "Well?" said he, inquiringly.

"Is it you, Jean? In truth, you frightened me."

"Well, what do you say to it?"

"Why, that I shall be admirably situated here for seeing all that passes; unluckily, I shall not be able to hear everything."

"Ah! faith, you want too much. By-the-bye, I have another piece of news for you."

"What is it?"

"Wonderful!"

"Pooh!"

"Incomparable!"

"What a bore the man is with his exclamations!"

"The philosopher——'

"Well, what of the philosopher?"

"It is commonly said, 'The wise man is for all events prepared.' Now I am a wise man, but I was not prepared for this."

"I should like to know when you will finish. Perhaps this girl is in the way. In that case, Mademoiselle Sylvie, step into the next room."

"Oh, there is no occasion whatever. That charming girl is not in the way; quite the contrary. Remain, Sylvie, remain." And the viscount chucked the handsome waiting maid's chin, whose brow began already to darken at the idea that something was about to be said which she was not to hear.

"Let her stay, then; but speak."

"Why, I have done nothing else since I have been here."

"And said nothing. So hold your tongue, and let me watch; that will be more to the purpose."

"Don't be out of temper! As I was saying, then, I was passing the fountain——"

"Positively you never said a word about it."

"Why, there you interrupt me again."

"No."

"I was passing the fountain, then, and bargaining for some old furniture for this frightful lodging, when all at once I felt a stream of water splashing my stockings."

"How very interesting all this is!"

"Only wait; you are in too great a hurry, my dear. Well, I looked, and I saw—guess what—I will give you a hundred guesses——"

"Do go on."

"I saw a young gentleman obstructing the jet of the fountain with a piece of bread, and by means of this obstacle causing the water to diverge and to spirt upon me."

"I can't tell you how much your story interests me," said Chon, shrugging her shoulders.

"Only wait. I swore lustily on feeling myself splashed; the bread-soaker turned round, and I saw——"

"Who? Gilbert?"

"Himself—bare-headed, his waistcoat open, stockings dangling about his heels—shoes unbuckled—in complete undress, in short."

"Gilbert!—And what did he say?"

"I recognised him at once, and he recognised me. I advanced; he retreated. I stretched out my arm; he stretched his legs; and off he scampered, like a greyhound, among the carriages and the water-porters."

"You lost sight of him, then?"

"Parbleu! I believe so. You surely do not suppose that I would start off and run too?"

"True; it was impossible, I admit. And so we have lost him."

"Ah! what a pity!" ejaculated Mademoiselle Sylvie.

"Oh! most certainly," said Jean; "I owe him a sound thrashing; and if I had once laid hands upon him, he should have lost nothing for waiting, I promise you; but he guessed my kind intentions towards him, and made good use of his legs."

"No matter; here he is in Paris; that is the essential point; and, in Paris, if you are not on very bad terms with the lieutenant of police, you may find whatever you seek."

"We must find him."

"And when we have got him, we must keep him, too."

"He must be shut up," said Mademoiselle Sylvie; "only, this time, a safer place must be chosen for the purpose."

"And Sylvie will carry his bread and water to that safe place—will you not, Sylvie?" said the viscount.

"It is no subject for jesting, brother," said Chon; "that lad saw the affair of the post-horses, and if he had motives for bearing us a grudge, we might have reason to fear him."

"And therefore," replied Jean, "I made up my mind, while ascending your stairs, to call on M. de Sartines and inform him of my discovery. M. de Sartines will reply, that a man, bare-headed, his stockings about his heels, his shoes unbuckled, soaking his bread at a fountain, must live near the spot where he has been seen in such a plight, and he will then engage to find him for us."

"What can he do here without money?"

"Go errands."

"He! A philosopher of that wild breed! I am surprised at you!"

"He has perhaps found out a relation," said Sylvie; "some old devotee, who gives him the crusts that are too stale for her lap-dog."

"Enough, enough, Sylvie! Put the house-linen into that old chest; and come you, brother, to our observatory."

Accordingly the pair approached the window with the greatest caution. Andrée had quitted her embroidery, and extended her limbs carelessly

upon an arm-chair ; then stretched out her hand to a book lying on another chair within her reach, opened it, and was soon absorbed in what the spectators supposed must be a most interesting subject, for the young girl remained motionless from the moment that she commenced to read.

"Oh ! the studious creature !" said Mademoiselle Chon ; "what can she be reading there ?"

"First indispensable article of furniture," replied the viscount, taking from his pocket an opera-glass, which he drew out and pointed at Andrée, resting it upon the angle of the window for the purpose of steadying it. Chon watched his movements with impatience.

"Well, let us see ; is the creature really handsome ?" asked she.

"Admirable ! She is an exquisite girl ! What arms ! what hands ! what eyes !—lips too tempting for St. Anthony—feet, oh ! divine feet ! and the ankle—what an ankle under that silk stocking !"

"Oh ! I should advise you to fall in love with her ; that would complete the affair," said Chon, peevishly.

"Well, after all, that would be no bad idea either, especially if she would grant me a little love in return ; that would somewhat cheer our poor countess."

"Come, hand me that glass, and a truce to your gabble, if that is possible. Yes, in truth, the girl is handsome, and it is impossible that she should not have a lover. She is not reading—look, the book is slipping out of her hand ! There, it drops !—stay—I told you, Jean, she was not reading—she is lost in thought."

"Or sleep."

"With her eyes open ! Lovely eyes, upon my word.

"At any rate," said Jean, "if she have a lover, we shall have a good view of him here."

"Yes, if he comes in the day-time ; but if he should come at night ?"

"The deuce ! I did not think of that ; and yet it is the first thing that I ought to have thought of ; that proves how very simple I am."

"Yes ; simple as a lawyer."

"However, now that I am forwarned, I shall devise something."

"What an excellent glass this is !" said Chon. "I can almost read the characters in the book."

Chon had leaned forward out of the window, attracted by her curiosity ; but she pulled back her head faster than she had advanced it.

"Well, what is the matter ?" asked the viscount.

Chon grasped his arm. "Look cautiously, brother," said she ; "look, who is that person who is leaning out of yonder garret-window on the left ? Take care not to be seen."

"Oh, ho !" cried Dubarry, in a low tone ; "it is my crust-soaker, God forgive me !"

"He is going to throw himself out !"

"No ; he has fast hold of the parapet."

"But what is he looking at with those piercing eyes, with that wild eagerness ?"

"He is watching somebody." The viscount struck his forehead. "I have it !" he exclaimed.

"What ?"

"By heavens, he is watching the girl !"

"Mademoiselle de Taverney ?"

"Yes, yes ; that's the inamorato of the dove-cot. She comes to Paris—he hastens hither too ; she takes lodgings in the Rue Coq-Heron—he

sneaks away from us to go and live in the Rue Plastrière. He is looking at her, and she is musing."

"Upon my word, it is true," said Chon. "Observe that look, how intently fixed. That lurid fire of his eyes. He is distractedly in love."

"Sister," said Jean, "let us not give ourselves any further trouble to watch the lady; he will do our business."

"Yes; for his own interest."

"No; for ours. Now let me go and see that dear Sartines. *Pardieu!* we have a chance. But take care, Chon, not to let the philosopher see you; you know how quickly he decamps!"

CHAPTER LXIII.

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

M. DE SARTINES had returned home at three in the morning, extremely fatigued, but at the same time highly pleased, with the entertainment which he had got up on the spur of the moment for the king and Madame Dubarry. Rekindled by the arrival of the dauphiness, the popular enthusiasm had greeted his majesty with sundry shouts of "*Vive le Roi!*" greatly diminished in volume since that famous illness at Metz, during which all France had been seen in the churches or on pilgrimage, to obtain the restoration to health of the young Louis XV., called at that time the well-beloved. On the other hand, Madame Dubarry, who scarcely ever failed to be insulted in public by certain exclamations of a particular kind, had, contrary to her expectation, been graciously received by several rows of spectators judiciously placed in front; so that the pleased monarch had smiled graciously on M. de Sartines, and the lieutenant of police reckoned upon a handsome acknowledgment. In consequence, he thought that he might lie till noon, which he had not done for a very long time; and, on rising, he had taken advantage of this kind of holiday which he gave himself, to try on some dozen or two of new wigs, while listening to the reports of the night. At the sixth wig, and when about a third through the reports, the Viscount Jean Dubarry was announced.

"Good!" thought M. de Sartines, "here come my thanks. But who knows? women are so capricious. Show M. le Vicomte into the drawing-room."

Jean, already fatigued with his forenoon's work, seated himself in an arm-chair, and the lieutenant of police, who speedily joined him, felt convinced that there would be nothing unpleasant in this interview. Jean appeared in fact in the highest spirits. The two gentlemen shook hands.

"Well, viscount," said M. de Sartines; "what brings you so early?"

"In the first place," replied Jean, who was accustomed above all things to flatter the self-love of those whose good offices he needed, "in the first place, I was anxious to congratulate you on the capital arrangements of your fête yesterday."

"Ah! many thanks. Is it officially?"

"Officially, as far as regards Luciennes."

"That is all I want. Is it not there that the sun rises?"

"Aye, and retires to rest occasionally."

And Dubarry burst into a loud and rather vulgar laugh, but one which gave his physiognomy that good-natured look which it frequently required.

"But," said he, "besides the compliments which I have to pay you, I have come to solicit a service also."

"Two, if they are possible."

"Not so fast; I hope to hear you say so, by-and-by. When a thing is lost in Paris, is there any hope of finding it again?"

"If it is either worth nothing, or worth a great deal, there is."

"What I am seeking is of no great value," said Jean, shaking his head.

"And what are you in search of?"

"I am in search of a lad about eighteen years old."

M. de Sartines extended his hand to a paper, took a pencil, and wrote.

"Eighteen years old; what is your lad's name?"

"Gilbert."

"What does he do?"

"As little as he can help, I suppose."

"Where does he come from?"

"From Lorraine."

"With whom was he?"

"In the service of the Taverneys."

"They brought him with them?"

"No, my sister Chon picked him up on the high-road, perishing with hunger; she took him into her carriage and brought him to Luciennes, and there——"

"Well, and there?"

"I am afraid the rogue has abused the hospitality he met with."

"Has he stolen anything?"

"I do not say that. But, in short, he absconded in a strange way."

"And you would now like to get him back?"

"Yes."

"Have you any idea where he can be?"

"I met him yesterday at the fountain which forms the corner of the Rue Plastrière, and have every reason to think that he lives in the street. In fact, I believe, if necessary, that I can point out the house."

"Well, but if you know the house, nothing is easier than to have him seized there. What do you wish to do with him when you have caught him? Have him shut up at Charenton?—in the Bicetre?"

"Not precisely that."

"Oh! whatever you please, my dear fellow. Don't stand on ceremony."

"No, on the contrary, this lad pleased my sister, and she would have liked to keep him about her, as he is intelligent. If one could get him back for her by fair means, it would be more desirable."

"We must try. You have not made any inquiry in the Rue Plastrière to learn with whom he is?"

"Oh, no! You must understand that I did not wish to attract attention, for fear of losing the advantage I had observed. He had already perceived me, and scampered off as if the devil was at his heels; and, if he had known that I was aware of his retreat, he would perhaps have decamped."

"Very likely. Rue Plastrière, you say. At the end, the middle, or the beginning of the street."

"About one-third down."

"Rest satisfied, I will send a clever fellow thither for you."

"Ah, my dear lieutenant, a man, let him be ever so clever, will always talk a little."

"No, our people never talk."

"The young one is cunning as a fox."

"Ah! I comprehend. Pardon me for not having seen your drift sooner. You wish me to go myself? In fact, you are right; it will be better, for there are perhaps difficulties in the way which you are not aware of."

Jean, though persuaded that the magistrate was desirous to assume a little consequence, was not disposed to diminish in the slightest degree the importance of his part. He even added, "It is precisely on account of these difficulties which you anticipate that I am desirous to have your personal assistance."

M. de Sartines rang for his valet de chambre. "Let the horses be put to," said he.

"I have a carriage," said Jean.

"Thank you, but I had rather have my own. Mine is without arms, and holds a middle place between a hackney-coach and a chariot. It is freshly painted every month, and for that reason is scarcely to be recognised again. In the meantime, while they are putting the horses to, permit me to try how my new wigs fit me."

"Oh! by all means," said Jean.

M. de Sartines summoned his wig-maker. He was an artist of the first water, and brought his client a perfect assortment of wigs; they were of all forms, of all colours, of all dimensions, and of all denominations. M. de Sartines occasionally changed his dress three or four times a day for the purpose of his exploring visits, and he was most particular with regard to the regularity of his costume. While the magistrate was trying on his twenty-fourth wig, a servant came to tell him that the carriage was ready.

"You will know the house again?" said M. de Sartines to Jean, when they were in the carriage.

"Certainly; I see it from this place."

"Have you examined the entrance?"

"That was the first thing I looked to."

"And what sort of an entry is it?"

"An alley."

"Ah! an alley; one-third down the street, you say?"

"Yes, with a private door."

"With a private door? The deuce! Do you know on what floor your runaway lives?"

"In the attics. But you will see it directly; I perceive the fountain."

"At a foot-pace, coachman," said M. de Sartines.

The coachman moderated his speed; M. de Sartines drew up the glasses.

"Stop," said Jean; "it is that dingy-looking house."

"Ah, precisely," exclaimed M. de Sartines, clasping his hands; "that is just what I feared."

"What! Are you afraid of something?"

"Alas! yes."

"And what are you afraid of?"

"You are unlucky."

"Explain yourself."

"Why, that dingy house where your runaway lives is the very house of Monsieur Rousseau, of Geneva."

"Rousseau, the author?"

"Yes."

"Well, and how does that concern you?"

"How does that concern me? Ah! it is plain enough that you are not lieutenant of police, and that you have nothing to do with philosophers."

"Pooh, pooh! Gilbert at Monsieur Rousseau's—what an improbable story!"

"Have you not said that your youth is a philosopher?"

"Yes."

"Well—'birds of a feather'—you know."

"And supposing that he should be at Monsieur Rousseau's?"

"Yes, let us suppose that."

"What would be the consequence?"

"That you would not have him."

"Pardieu! Why not?"

"Because Monsieur Rousseau is a man who is much to be dreaded."

"Why not shut him up in the Bastille, then?"

"I proposed it the other day to the king, but he dared not."

"What! dared not?"

"No, no; he wanted to leave the responsibility of his arrest to me; and by my faith, I was not bolder than the king."

"Indeed!"

"It is as I tell you. We have to look twice, I assure you, before we bring all those philosophers about our ears. Peste! Take a person away from Monsieur Rousseau's? No, my dear friend, it will not do."

"In truth, my dear magistrate, you appear to be excessively timorous. Is not the king the king? Are you not his lieutenant of police?"

"And, in truth, you citizens are charming fellows. When you have said, 'Is not the king the king?' you fancy that you have said all that is necessary. Well, listen to me, my dear viscount. I would rather arrest you at Madame Dubarry's than remove your Monsieur Gilbert from Monsieur Rousseau's."

"Really! Many thanks for the preference."

"Yes, upon my honour—there would be less outcry. You have no idea what delicate skins those literary men have; they cry out at the slightest scratch, as if you were breaking them upon the wheel."

"But let us not conjure up phantoms; look you, is it quite certain that Monsieur Rousseau has harboured our fugitive? This house has four floors. Does it belong to him, and does he alone live in it?"

"Monsieur Rousseau is not worth a denier, and, consequently, has no house in Paris: there are probably from fifteen to twenty other inmates besides himself in yonder barrack. But take this for a rule of conduct: whenever ill luck appears at all probable, reckon upon it; whenever good luck, never reckon upon that. There are always ninety-nine chances for the ill and one for the good. But, however, wait a moment. As I suspected what would happen, I have brought my notes with me."

"What notes?"

"My notes respecting Monsieur Rousseau. Do you suppose that he can take a step without our knowing whither he is gone?"

"Ha! indeed! Then he is really dangerous?"

"No; but he makes us uneasy. Such a madman may at any time break an arm or a leg, and people would say it was we who had broken it."

"A good thing if he would break his neck some day."

"God forbid!"

"Permit me to tell you that this is quite incomprehensible to me."

"The people stone this honest Genevese from time to time, but they

allow no one else to do so ; and if the smallest pebble were flung at him by us, they would stone us in return."

"Excuse me, but in truth, I know not what to make of all these doings."

"And so we must use the most minute precautions. Now let us verify the only chance which is left us : viz., that he does not lodge with Monsieur Rousseau. Keep yourself out of sight, at the back of the carriage."

Jean obeyed, and M. de Sartines ordered the coachman to walk the horses a few paces to and fro in the street.

He then opened his portfolio, and took some papers out of it. "Let me see," said he, "if your youth is with Monsieur Rousseau. Since what day do you suppose him to have been there?"

"Ever since the sixteenth."

"17th.—Monsieur Rousseau was seen herborising at six o'clock in the morning in the wood of Meudon : he was alone."

"He was alone !"

"Let us proceed. 'At two o'clock in the afternoon, he was herborising again, but with a young man.'"

"Ah, ha !" cried Jean.

"With a young man," repeated M. de Sartines, "do you understand?"

"That's he, mordieu ! that's he !"

"'The young man is mean-looking——'"

"That is he !"

"The two individuals pick up plants, and dry them in a tin box."

"The devil ! the devil !" exclaimed Dubarry.

"That is not all. Listen further : 'In the evening he took the young man home ; at midnight the young man had not left the house.'"

"Well."

"'18th.—The young man has not left the house, and appears to be installed at Monsieur Rousseau's.'"

"I have still a gleam of hope."

"You are decidedly an optimist ! No matter, tell me your hope."

"It is that he has some relation in the house."

"Come ! we must satisfy you, or rather, utterly destroy your hopes. Halt, coachman."

M. de Sartines alighted. He had not taken ten steps before he met a man in grey clothes, and of very equivocal aspect. This man, on perceiving the illustrious magistrate, took off his hat and replaced it, without appearing to attach further importance to his salutation, although respect and attachment had been expressed in his look. M. de Sartines made a sign ; the man approached, received some whispered instructions, and disappeared in Rousseau's alley. The lieutenant of police returned to his carriage. Five minutes after, the man in grey made his appearance again, and approached the door.

"I shall turn my head to the right," said Dubarry, "that I may not be seen."

M. de Sartines smiled, received the communication of his agent, and dismissed him.

"Well?" inquired Dubarry.

"Well ! the chance was against you, as I apprehended ; it is with Rousseau that your Gilbert lodges. You must give him up, depend upon it."

"Give him up?"

"Yes. You would not, for a whim, raise all the philosophers in Paris against us, would you?"

"Oh, heavens! and what will my sister Jeanne say?"

"Is she so much attached to Gilbert?" asked M. de Sartines.

"Indeed she is."

"Well, in that case, you must resort to gentle means, coax M. Rousseau, and, instead of letting Gilbert be taken from him by force, he will give him up voluntarily."

"As well set us to tame a bear."

"It is perhaps not so difficult a task as you imagine. Do not despair: he is fond of pretty faces; that of the countess is very handsome, and Mademoiselle Chon's is not unpleasing. Let me see—the countess will make a sacrifice for her whim?"

"She will make a hundred."

"Would she consent to fall in love with Rousseau?"

"If it is absolutely necessary."

"It will perhaps be useful; but to bring the parties together, we shall need a third person. Are you acquainted with any one who knows Rousseau?"

"M. de Conti."

"Won't do: he distrusts princes. We want a nobody, a scholar, a poet."

"We never see people of that sort."

"Have I not met M. de Jussieu at the countess's?"

"The botanist?"

"Yes."

"I' faith, I believe so: he comes to Trianon, and the countess lets him ravage her flowerbeds."

"That is your affair: and Jussieu is a friend of mine too."

"Then the thing is done."

"Almost."

"I shall get back my Gilbert, then?"

M. de Sartines mused for a moment. "I begin to think you will," said he, "and without violence, without noise. Rousseau will deliver him up to you, bound hand and foot."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"And what must be done to bring this about?"

"The merest trifle. You have, no doubt, a piece of vacant ground towards Meudon or Marly?"

"Oh! no want of that. I know ten such between Luciennes and Bougival."

"Well, get built upon it—what shall I call the thing?—a philosopher's trap."

"Excuse me, what was it you said?"

"I said, a philosopher's trap."

"Pardieu! and how is that built?"

"I will give you a plan of it; rest satisfied. And now, let us be off; we begin to be noticed. To the hotel, coachman."

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE TWO FETES.

THE important events of history are to the novelist what gigantic mountains are to the traveller. He surveys them, he skirts their foot, he salutes them as he passes, but he does not climb them. In like manner we shall

survey, skirt, and salute that august ceremony, the marriage of the dauphiness at Versailles. The ceremonial of France is the only chronicle that ought to be consulted in such a case. It is not, in fact, in the splendour of the Versailles of Louis XV., in the description of the court-dresses, the liveries, the pontifical ornaments, that our particular history, that modest follower who takes a by-path leading along the high road of the history of France, would find anything to pick up. Let us leave the ceremony to be performed amidst the brilliant sunshine of a fine day in May; let us leave the illustrious spectators to retire in silence, and to describe or comment on the marvels of the exhibition which they had just witnessed; and let us return to our peculiar events and personages, which also have, historically speaking, a certain value.

The king, weary of the ceremonies, and especially of the dinner, which had been long and was an exact imitation of that given on the marriage of the great dauphin, son of Louis XIV.—the king retired to his apartments at nine o'clock and dismissed everybody. The dauphin and his bride had also retired to their apartments; and the immense crowd of spectators of the ceremony thronged the court-yard and the terraces of Versailles, now one blaze of light, and waited anxiously for the fireworks, which were to be exhibited on a scale of unusual magnificence.

The evening, at first lovely and serene, by degrees became overcast, and gusts of wind, gradually increasing in violence, tossed the branches wildly to and fro, as if they had been shaken by some giant arm; while immense masses of clouds hurried across the heavens, like squadrons rushing to the charge. The illuminations were suddenly extinguished, and, as if fate had determined to turn the general rejoicings into gloom, no sooner had the first rockets been discharged than the rain descended in torrents, as if the heavens had opened, and a loud and startling peal of thunder announced a terrible convulsion of the elements.

Meanwhile, the people of Versailles and Paris fled like a flock of frightened birds, scattered over the gardens, in the roads, in the woods, pursued in all directions by thick hail, which beat down the flowers in the gardens, the foliage in the forest, the wheat and the barley in the fields. By morning, however, all this chaos was reduced to order, and the first rays of light, darting from between copper-coloured clouds, displayed to view the ravages of the nocturnal hurricane.

Versailles was no longer to be recognised. The ground had imbibed that deluge of water, the trees had absorbed that deluge of fire; everywhere were seas of muddy water, and trees broken, twisted, calcined, by that serpent with burning gripe called lightning. As soon as it was light Louis XV., whose terror was so great that he could not sleep, ordered Lebel, who had never left him during the night, to dress him. He then proceeded to the bridal-chamber, and, pushing open the door, shuddered on perceiving the future queen of France reclining on a prie-dieu, pale, and with eyes swollen and violet coloured, like those of the sublime Magdalen of Rubens. Her terror, caused by the hurricane, had at length been suspended by sleep, and the first dawn of morning which stole into the apartment tinged with religious respect her long white robe with an azure hue. At the further end of the chamber, in an arm-chair pushed back to the wall, and surrounded by a pool of water which had forced its way through the shattered windows, reposed the dauphin of France, pale as his young bride, and, like her, having the perspiration of nightmare on his brow. The nuptial bed was in precisely the same state as on the preceding evening.

Louis XV. knit his brow; a pain, keener than any he had yet felt, darted through that brow like a red-hot iron. He shook his head, heaved a deep sigh, and returned to his apartments, more gloomy and more affrighted, perhaps, at that moment than he had been during the night.

* * * * * *

On the 30th of May, that is, on the second day after that tremendous night, that night fraught with presages and warnings, Paris celebrated in its turn the marriage festival of its future sovereign. The whole population poured, in consequence, towards the Place Louis XV., where were to be exhibited the fireworks, that necessary accompaniment to every great public solemnity, which the Parisian accepts scoffingly, but which he cannot dispense with. The spot was judiciously chosen. Six hundred thousand spectators could move about there at their ease. Around the equestrian statue of Louis XV. had been erected a circular scaffolding, which, by raising the fireworks ten or twelve feet above the ground, enabled all the spectators in the place to see them distinctly. The Parisians arrived, according to custom, in groups, and spent some time in choosing the best places, an inalienable privilege of the first comers. Boys found trees, grave men posts, women the railings of fences and temporary stands, erected in the open air, as usual at all Parisian festivities, by gipsy speculators, whose fertile imagination allows them to change their mode of speculation every day. About seven o'clock, along with the earliest of the spectators, arrived several parties of police.

The duty of watching over the safety of Paris was not performed by the French Guards, to whom the city authorities would not grant the gratuity of a thousand crowns demanded by their colonel, the Marshal Duke de Biron.

That regiment was both feared and liked by the population, by whom each member of the corps was regarded at once as a Cæsar and a Mandrin. The French Guards, terrible on the field of battle, inexorable in the fulfilment of their functions, had, in time of peace and out of service, a frightful character for brutality and misconduct. On duty they were handsome, brave, intractable; and their evolutions delighted women and awed husbands; but, when dispersed among the crowd as mere individuals, they became the terror of those whose admiration they had won the day before, and severely persecuted the people whom they would have to protect on the morrow. Now, the city, finding in its old grudge against these night-brawlers and sharpers a reason for not giving a thousand crowns to the French Guards—the city, we say, sent merely its civil force, upon the specious pretext that in a family festivity, like that in preparation, the usual guardians of the family ought to be sufficient. The French Guards, on leave therefore, mingled among the groups mentioned above, and, as licentious as they would under other circumstances have been severe, they produced among the crowd, in their quality of soldier-citizens, all those little irregularities which they would have repressed with the butts of their muskets, with kicks and cuffs, nay even with taking the offenders into custody, if their commander, their Cæsar Biron, had had a right to call them on that evening soldiers.

The shrieks of the women, the grumbling of the citizens, the complaints of the hucksters, whose cakes and ginger-bread were eaten without being paid for, raised a sham tumult preparatory to the real commotion, which could not fail to take place when six hundred thousand sight-loving persons should be assembled on that spot, and constituted so animated a scene, that the Place Louis XV., about eight o'clock in the evening, pre-

sented much the appearance of one of Tenier's pictures on a large scale, and with French instead of Dutch merry-makers. After the gamins, or street boys of Paris, at once the most impatient and the idlest in the known world, had taken or clambered up to their places ; after the citizens and the populace had settled themselves in theirs, the carriages of the nobility and the financiers arrived. No route had been marked out for them ; and they therefore entered the place at random by the Rue de la Madeline and the Rue St. Honoré, setting down at the new buildings, as they were called, those who had received invitations for the windows and balconies of the governor's house, from which an excellent view could be obtained of the fireworks.

Such of the persons in carriages as had not invitations, left their equipages at the corner of the place, and, preceded by their footmen, mingled in the crowd, already very dense, but in which there was still room for any one who knew how to conquer it. It was curious to observe with what sagacity those lovers of sights availed themselves, in their ambitious progress, of every inequality of ground. The very wide, but as yet unfinished, street which was to be called the Rue Royale, was intersected here and there by deep ditches, on the margins of which had been heaped the mould thrown out of them and other rubbish. Each of these little eminences had its group, looking like a loftier billow rising above the level of that human ocean.

From time to time this wave, propelled by other waves behind it, toppled over, amid the laughter of the multitude, not yet so crowded as to cause such falls to be attended with danger, or to prevent those who fell from scrambling to their feet again.

About half-past eight, all eyes, hitherto wandering in different directions, began to converge towards the same point, and to fix themselves on the scaffolding which contained the fireworks. It was then that elbows, plied without ceasing, commenced to maintain in good earnest the position they had gained, against the assaults of incessantly-reinforced invaders.

These fireworks, designed by Ruggieri, were intended to rival (a rivalship, by the way, which the storm two evenings before had rendered easy) —those executed at Versailles by Torre, the engineer. It was known in Paris that Versailles had derived little pleasure from the royal liberality, which had granted fifty thousand livres for their exhibition, since the very first discharges had been extinguished by the rain, and, as the weather was fine on the evening of the 30th of May, the Parisians reckoned upon a certain triumph over their neighbours of Versailles.

Besides, Paris expected much more from the old established popularity of Ruggieri, than from the recent reputation of Torre.

Moreover, the plan of Ruggieri, less capricious and less vague than that of his colleague, bespoke pyrotechnical intentions of a highly distinguished order. Allegory, which reigned supreme at that period, was coupled with the most graceful architectural style, and the scaffolding represented the ancient temple of Hymen, which, with the French, rivals in ever springing youth the temple of Glory. It was supported by a gigantic colonnade, and surrounded by a parapet, at the angles of which dolphins, open-mouthed, only awaited the signal to spout forth torrents of flames. Facing the dolphins rose, majestically upon their urns, the Loire, the Rhone, the Seine, and the Rhine,—that river which we persist in naturalizing and accounting French in spite of all the world, and, if we may believe the modern lays of our friends the Germans, in spite even of itself,—all four—we mean the rivers,—ready to pour forth, instead of water, blue, white, green,

rose-coloured flames, at the moment when the colonnade should be fired.

Other parts of the works, which were to be discharged at the same time, were to form gigantic vases of flowers on the terrace of the temple of Hymen.

Lastly, still upon this same palace, destined to support so many different things, rose a luminous pyramid, terminated by the terrestrial globe. This globe, after emitting a rumbling noise like distant thunder, was to burst with a crash and to discharge a mass of coloured girandoles.

As for the *bouquet*—so important and indeed indispensable an accompaniment that no Parisian ever judges of fireworks but by the *bouquet*—Ruggieri had separated it from the main body of the structure. It was placed towards the river, close to the statue, in a bastion crammed with spare rockets, so that the effect would be greatly improved by this additional elevation of six or eight yards, which would place the foot of the sheaf as it were upon a pedestal.

Such were the details which had engrossed the attention of all Paris for a fortnight previous. The Parisians now watched with great admiration Ruggieri and his assistants passing like shades amidst the lurid lights of their scaffolding, and pausing, with strange gestures, to fix their matches and to secure their priming.

The moment, therefore, that the lanterns were brought upon the terrace of the building—an appearance which indicated the approach of the discharge—it produced a strong sensation in the crowd, and some rows of the most courageous recoiled, producing a long oscillation which extended to the very extremities of the assembled multitude.

Carriages now continued to arrive in quick succession, and began to encroach more and more upon the Place; the horses resting their heads upon the shoulders of the rearmost spectators, who began to feel uneasy at the close vicinity of these dangerous neighbours. Presently the crowd, every moment increasing, collected behind the carriages, so that it was not possible for them to withdraw from their position even had they been desirous to do so, embedded as they were in this compact and tumultuous throng. Then might be seen—inspired by that audacity peculiar to the Parisians when in an encroaching mood, and which has no parallel except the long-suffering of the same people when encroached upon—French Guards, artisans, and lacqueys, climbing upon the roofs of these carriages, like shipwrecked mariners upon a rocky shore.

The illumination of the boulevards threw from a distance its ruddy glare upon the heads of the thousands of spectators, amidst whom the bayonet of a city official, flashing like lightning, appeared as rare as the ears of corn left standing in a field levelled by the reaper.

On either side of the new buildings, now the Hôtel Crillon and the Garde Meuble of the Crown, the carriages of the invited guests—between which no precaution had been taken to leave a passage—had formed a triple rank which extended on one side from the boulevard to the Tuileries, and on the other from the boulevard to the Rue des Champs Elysées, turning like a serpent thrice doubled upon itself.

Along this triple row of carriages were seen wandering like spectres on the banks of the Styx, such of the invited as were prevented by the carriages of those earlier on the ground from reaching the principal entrance. Stunned by the noise, and unwilling, especially the ladies, who were dressed in satin from head to foot, to step upon the pavement, they were hustled to and fro by the waves of the populace, who jeered them for

their delicacy, and, seeking a passage between the wheels of the carriages and the feet of the horses, crept onwards as well as they could to the place of their destination—a goal as fervently desired as a haven of refuge by mariners in a storm.

One of these carriages arrived about nine o'clock, that is to say, a very few minutes before the time fixed for the commencement of the fireworks, in expectation of making its way towards the governor's door; but the attempt, so warmly disputed for some time back, had at this moment become extremely hazardous, if not impracticable. A fourth row of carriages had begun to form, reinforcing the first three, and the mettled horses, tormented by the crowd, had become furious, lashing out right and left upon the slightest provocation, and already causing several accidents unnoticed amidst the noise and bustle of the crowd.

Holding by the springs of this carriage, which was attempting to force its way through the concourse, walked a youth, pushing aside all comers who endeavoured to avail themselves of this means of locomotion, which he seemed to have confiscated for his exclusive use. When the carriage stopped, the youth stepped aside, but without loosing his hold of the protecting spring, which he continued to grasp with one hand. He could thus overhear, through the open door, the animated conversation of the party in the vehicle.

A female head, attired in white and adorned with a few natural flowers, leaned forward out of the carriage door. Immediately a voice exclaimed:

"Come, Andrée, provincial that you are, you must not lean out in that manner, or, *mordieu!* you run a great risk of being kissed by the first bumpkin that passes. Don't you see that our carriage is swimming as it were in the middle of this mob, just as if it were in the middle of the river. We are in the water, my dear, and dirty water it is: let us not soil ourselves by the contact."

The young lady's head was drawn back into the carriage.

"We cannot see anything from this, sir," said she; "if our horses were to make a half-turn, we could see from the door of the carriage, and be almost as well off as if we were at the governor's window."

"Turn about a little, coachman," cried the baron.

"It is impossible, Monsieur le Baron; I should be obliged to crush ten persons."

"Well, *pardieu!* crush away."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Andrée.

"Oh, father!" cried Philip.

"Who is that baron that talks of crushing poor folk?" cried several threatening voices.

"*Parbleu!* it is I," said Taverney, leaning out, and exhibiting as he did so a broad red ribbon crossed over his breast.

At that time people still paid some respect to broad ribbons—even to red ones. There was some grumbling, but on a descending scale.

"Wait, father, I will alight," said Philip, "and see if there is any possibility of advancing."

"Take care, brother, or you will be killed. Hark to the neighing of the horses, which are fighting with one another!"

"Say rather the roaring," resumed the baron. "Stay! we will alight. Tell them to make way, Philip, and let us pass."

"Ah, father!" said Philip, "you are quite a stranger to the Paris of the present day. Such lordly airs might have passed current formerly, but nowadays they are but little heeded; and you have no wish to compromise your dignity, I am sure."

"Still, when these saucy fellows know who I am——"

"My dear father," said Philip, smiling, "were you the dauphin himself they would not stir an inch for you. At this moment, particularly, I should fear the consequences of such a step, for I see the fireworks are about to commence."

"Then we shall see nothing!" said Andrée, with vexation.

"It is your own fault, *pardieu!*" replied the baron; "you were upwards of two hours at your toilet."

"Brother," said Andrée, "could I not take your arm and place myself among the crowd?"

"Yes, yes, my sweet lady," exclaimed several voices, touched with her beauty; "yes, come along; you are not very large, and we'll make room for you."

"Should you like to come, Andrée?" asked Philip.

"Oh! yes," said Andrée; and she sprang lightly from the carriage without touching the steps.

"Very well," said the baron; "but I, who care not a straw about fireworks, will stay where I am.

"Yes, remain here," said Philip; "we will not go far, my dear father."

In fact, the mob, ever respectful when not irritated by any passion, ever paying homage to that sovereign goddess called beauty, opened to make way for Andreé and her brother; and a good-natured citizen, who with his family occupied a stone bench, desired his wife and daughter to make room for Andrée between them. Philip placed himself at his sister's feet, who leaned with one hand on his shoulder. Gilbert had followed them, and was stationed about four paces off, with his eyes riveted upon Andrée.

"Are you comfortably placed, Andrée?" asked Philip.

"Excellently," replied the young girl.

"See what it is to be handsome!" said the viscount, smiling.

"Yes, yes, handsome—very handsome!" murmured Gilbert.

Andrée heard those words; but as they proceeded doubtless from the lips of one of the populace, she cared no more about them than an Indian god cares for the offering which a poor pariah lays at his feet.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE FIREWORKS.

ANDRÉE and her brother has scarcely settled themselves in their new position when the first rockets pierced the clouds, and a prodigious shout arose from the crowd, thenceforward alive only to the spectacle which was exhibiting in the centre of the Place.

The commencement of the fireworks was magnificent, and in every respect worthy of the high reputation of Ruggieri. The decorations of the temple were progressively lighted up, and soon presented one sheet of flame. The air rang with plaudits; but these plaudits were soon succeeded by frantic cheers, when the gaping mouths of the dolphins and the urns of the rivers began to spout forth streams of fire of different colours, which crossed and intermingled with each other.

Andrée, transported with astonishment at this sight, which has not its equal in the world—that of a population of seven hundred thousand souls, frantic with delight in front of a palace in flames—did not even attempt to conceal her feelings.

At three paces distant from her, hidden by the herculean shoulders of a porter who held his child aloft over his head, stood Gilbert, gazing at Andrée for her own sake, and at the fireworks because she was looking at them. Gilbert's view of Andrée was in profile ; every rocket lighted up that lovely face, and made him tremble with delight. It seemed to him that the whole crowd shared in his admiration of the heavenly creature whom he adored. Andrée had never before seen Paris, or a crowd, or the splendours of a public rejoicing ; and her mind was stunned by the multiplicity of novel sensations which beset it at once.

On a sudden, a bright light burst forth and darted in a diagonal line towards the river. It was a bomb, which exploded with a crash, scattering the various coloured fires which Andrée admired.

"Look, Philip, how beautiful that is !" said she.

"Good Heavens !" exclaimed her brother, without making her any reply, "how ill that last rocket was directed ! It must certainly have deviated from its course ; for, instead of describing a parabola, it went off almost horizontally."

Philip had scarcely finished this expression of an uneasiness which began to be manifested in the agitation of the crowd, when a hurricane of flame burst from the bastion upon which were placed the *bouquet* and the spare fireworks. A crash equal to that of a hundred peals of thunder, crossing in all directions, bellowed through the Place ; and, as if the fire had contained a discharge of grape-shot, it put to the rout the nearest spectators, who for a moment felt the unexpected flame scorch their faces.

"The *bouquet* already ! the *bouquet* already !" cried the more distant of the crowd. "Not yet ! it is too early !"

"Already ?" repeated Andrée. "Ah, yes ; it is too early !"

"No," said Philip, "no ; it is not the *bouquet*, it is an accident, which in a moment will agitate this prodigious crowd, now so calm, like the ocean in a storm. Come, Andrée, let us return to our carriage—come along !"

"Oh ! let me stay a little longer, Philip—it is so beautiful !"

"Andrée, we have not a moment to lose : follow me. It is the misfortune which I feared. Some stray rocket has set fire to the bastion. Hark ! they are crushing one another yonder ! Don't you hear their cries ? Those are not cries of joy, but shrieks of distress. Quick ! quick ! to the carriage. Gentlemen, gentlemen, allow us to pass."

And Philip, throwing his arm round his sister's waist, drew her towards the place where he had left his father, who, uneasy on his side, and dreading, from the noise which he heard, a danger of the nature of which he could form no conception, although he was thoroughly convinced of its existence, put his head out of the carriage door, and looked about for his children. It was already too late, and the prediction of Philip was verified. The *bouquet*, composed of fifteen thousand fusees, exploded, scattering about in all directions, and pursuing the spectators like those fiery darts which are flung at the bulls in the arena to provoke them to fight.

The people, at first astonished, then terrified, recoiled from the force of mere instinct with resistless impetus, communicating the same movement to the myriads of spectators in the rear, who, breathless and suffocated, pressed backwards in their turn on those behind them. The scaffolding took fire ; children shrieked ; squalling women, almost stifled, raised them in their arms ; and the police, thinking to silence the screamers and to restore order by violence, struck right and left at random. All these combined causes made the waving sea of people which Philip spoke of fall

like a water-spout on that corner of the Place where he was ; and instead of rejoining the baron's carriage, as he calculated upon doing, the youth was hurried away by the mighty and irresistible current, of which no description could convey any idea ; for individual strength, increased tenfold by terror and anxiety, was again augmented a hundredfold by the junction of the general strength.

At the moment when Philip drew Andrée away, Gilbert had resigned himself to the stream which carried them along ; but he had not gone above twenty paces before a band of fugitives, turning to the left into the Rue de la Madeleine, surrounded Gilbert and swept him away, foaming with rage on finding himself separated from Andrée.

Andrée, clinging fast to Philip's arm, was inclosed in a group which was striving to get out of the way of a carriage dragged along by a pair of furious horses. Philip saw it approaching swiftly and threateningly : the horses' eyes flashed fire, and they snorted foam from their nostrils. He made superhuman efforts to avoid it, but all in vain. He saw the crowd open behind him ; he perceived the foaming heads of the two ungovernable animals ; he saw them rear, like the two marble horses which guard the entrance of the Tuileries, and, like the slave who is striving to subdue them, letting go Andrée's arm, and pushing her as far as he could out of the way of danger, he sprang up to seize the rein of the horse that was next to him. The animal reared a second time ; Andrée saw her brother sink back, fall, and disappear from her sight. She shrieked, extended her arms, was hustled to and fro in the crowd, and in a moment found herself alone, tottering, borne along like a feather by the wind, and just as incapable of resisting the force that was hurrying her away.

The stunning cries, far more terrible than those of the battlefield ; the neighing of horses ; the frightful noise of wheels, grinding now the pavement, now the bodies of the slain, the lurid flames of the scaffolds which were on fire ; the sinister gleaming of swords drawn by some of the infuriated soldiers ; and over all this ensanguined chaos, the bronze statue, tinged by the ruddy reflections, and seeming to preside over the carnage —were more than was needed to disturb Andrée's reason, and paralyse her strength. Besides, the power of a Titan would have been impotent in such a struggle—a struggle for life and limb—of one against all. Andrée uttered a piercing shriek : a soldier, opening himself a passage through the crowd, was striking the people with his sword, and the weapon flashed over her head. She clasped her hands, like a shipwrecked mariner when the last wave is passing over him, and exclaiming : "Oh, my God !" sunk to the ground. Whoever fell in that scene might give himself up for lost !

But that terrible, that despairing shriek, was heard and answered. Gilbert, carried to a distance from Andrée, had by dint of struggling once more approached her. Bending beneath the same wave which had engulphed Andrée, he raised himself again, made a frantic leap at the sword which had unwittingly threatened her, grasped the throat of the soldier who was going to strike, and hurled him to the ground. Beside the soldier lay a female form dressed in white ; he raised her up and bore her off as though he had been a giant.

When he felt that lovely form, that corpse perhaps, pressed to his heart, a gleam of pride lighted up his countenance—his force and courage rose with the circumstances—he felt himself a hero ! He flung himself and his burden into a stream of people, whose torrent would certainly have levelled a wall in their flight. Supported by this group, which lifted him up and bore him along with his lovely burden, he walked or rather rolled onwards

for some minutes. All at once the torrent stopped, as if broken by some opposing obstacle. Gilbert's feet touched the ground, and not till then was he sensible of the weight of Andrée. He looked up to ascertain what the obstacle might be, and perceived that he was within a few steps of the Garde-Meuble. That mass of stone had broken the mass of flesh.

During that momentary and anxious halt, he had time to look at Andrée. Overcome by a sleep heavy as that of death, her heart had ceased to beat, her eyes were closed, and her face was of a violet tinge, like a white rose that is fading. Gilbert thought that she was dead. He shrieked in his turn, pressed his lips at first to her dress, to her hand, then, emboldened by her insensibility, he covered with kisses that cold face, those eyes swollen beneath their sealed lids. He blushed, wept, raved, strove to transfuse his soul into the bosom of Andrée, feeling astonished that his kisses, which might have warmed a marble statue, had no effect upon that inanimate form. All at once Gilbert felt her heart beat under his hand.

"She is saved!" exclaimed he, on perceiving the swart and blood-stained mob dispersing, and hearing the imprecations, the shrieks, the sighs, the agony of the victims die away in the distance. "She is saved, and it is I who have saved her!"

The poor fellow, who stood leaning with his back against the wall, and his eyes turned towards the bridge, had not looked to his right. Before the carriages, which, long detained by the crowd, but now hemmed in less closely, began once more to move, and soon came on galloping as if coachman and horses had been seized with a general frenzy, fled twenty thousand unfortunate creatures, mutilated, wounded, bruised one against the other Instinctively they fled close to the walls, against which the nearest of them were crushed. This mass swept away or suffocated all those who, having taken up their position near the Garde-Meuble, imagined that they had escaped the wreck. A fresh shower of blows, of living and dead bodies, rained on Gilbert. He found one of the recesses formed by the iron gates, and stationed himself there. The weight of the fugitives made the wall crack.

Gilbert, nearly stifled, felt ready to loose his hold, but with a last desperate effort, mustering all his strength, he encompassed Andrée's body with his arms, resting his head on the bosom of the young girl. One would have supposed that he meant to suffocate her whom he was protecting.

"Farewell," murmured he, biting rather than kissing her dress; "farewell!" And he raised his eyes to heaven, as if directing a last supplicating glance to it for assistance. Then a strange sight met his vision.

Mounted on a post, holding with his right hand by a ring let into the wall, while with his left hand he seemed to be rallying an army of fugitives, was a man, who, looking at the furious sea raging at his feet, sometimes dropped a word, sometimes made a gesture. At that word, at that gesture, some individual among the crowd might be seen to pause, struggle, and by a violent effort strive to reach the man. Others who had already reached him seemed to recognise the new-comers as brothers, and assisted to drag them out of the crowd, raising, supporting, and drawing them towards them.

In this manner, by acting together, this knot had, like the pier of a bridge which divides and resists the water, succeeded in dividing the crowd and holding in check the flying masses.

Every moment fresh stragglers, seeming to rise out of the ground at those strange words and singular gestures, swelled the retinue of this man.

Gilbert raised himself by a last effort; he felt that *there* was safety, for *there* was calmness and power. A last dying gleam from the burning scaffold, leaping up only to expire, fell upon his face. Gilbert uttered a cry of amazement: "Oh! let me die!" he murmured; "let me die, but save her!"

Then with a sublime forgetfulness of self, raising the young girl in both his arms, he exclaimed, "Baron de Balsamo, save Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney!"

Balsamo heard that voice which cried to him, like that in the Bible, from the depths, he beheld a white figure raised above the devouring waves, he leaped from his post to the ground, crying, "This way!" His party overturned all that obstructed their course, and, seizing Andrée, still supported in Gilbert's sinking arms, he lifted her up, and, impelled by a movement of that crowd which he had ceased to repress, he bore her off, without once turning to look behind.

Gilbert endeavoured to utter a last word. Perhaps, after imploring the protection of this strange man for Andrée, he might have solicited it for himself; but he had only strength to press his lips to the drooping arm of the young girl, and to snatch, with a wild and despairing grasp, a portion of her dress.

After that last kiss, after that final farewell, the young man had nothing left to live for; he made no further struggle, but closing his eyes, sunk dying upon a heap of dead.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE FIELD OF THE DEAD.

GREAT storms are always succeeded by calms, fearful in their very stillness, but bearing healing on their wings.

It was about two o'clock in the morning. The moon, wading between large white clouds which hovered over Paris, showed in strong relief by her wan and sickly light the inequalities of this sad spot, and the pits and holes in which so many of the fleeing crowd had found an untimely grave.

Here and there in the moonlight, which was obscured from time to time by the large white floating clouds we have mentioned, might be seen, on the margin of the slopes and in the ditches, heaps of corpses with disordered attire, stiffened limbs, livid and discoloured faces, and hands stretched out in an attitude of terror or of prayer.

In the centre of this place, a heavy tainted smoke, emitted from the burning embers of the timber, contributed to give to the Place Louis XV. the appearance of a battle-field.

Over this bloody and desolate plain flitted, with rapid and mysterious steps, shadowy figures, who stopped, looked stealthily round, bent down, and then fled. They were the robbers of the slain, attracted to their prey like vultures to the decaying carrion. They had not been able to rob the living, and they came to despoil the dead. Surprised at seeing themselves anticipated by their fellow robbers, they might be seen escaping sullenly and fearfully at the sight of the tardy bayonets which menaced them. But the robber and the lazy watchman were not the only persons moving among the long ranks of the dead.

There were some there who, furnished with lanterns, might have been taken for curious lookers-on. Sad lookers-on, alas! for they were parents

and anxious friends, whose children, brothers, friends, or lovers had not returned home. They had come from great distances, for the dreadful news had already spread over Paris like a hurricane, scattering dismay and horror, and their anxiety had been quickly changed into active search. It was a sight perhaps more dreadful to behold than the catastrophe itself. Every expression was portrayed on these pale faces, from the despair of those who discovered the corpse of the beloved being, to the gloomy uncertainty of those who had found nothing, and who cast an anxious and longing glance towards the river, which flowed onwards with a monotonous murmur.

It was reported that many corpses had already been thrown into the river by the provostry of Paris, who wished to conceal the fearful number of deaths their guilty imprudence had occasioned.

Then, when they had satiated their eyes with this fruitless spectacle, and, standing ankle deep in the Seine, had watched with anguished hearts its dark waters flow past unburthened with the loved bodies of those whom they sought, they proceeded, lantern in hand, to explore the neighbouring streets, where it was said many of the wounded had dragged themselves, to seek for help, or at least to flee from the scene of their sufferings.

When unfortunately they found amongst the dead the object of their search—the lost and wept-for friend—then cries succeeded to their heart-rending surprise, and their sobs, rising from some new point of the bloody scene, were responded to by other and distant sobs.

At times the place resounded with noises of a different kind. All at once a lantern falls and is broken—the living has fallen senseless on the dead, to embrace him for the last time.

There are yet other noises in this vast cemetery. Some of the wounded, whose limbs have been broken by the fall, whose breast has been pierced by the sword, or crushed by the weight of the crowd, utters a hoarse cry, or groans forth a prayer, and then those who hope to find in the sufferer a friend, hastily approach, but retire when they do not recognise him.

In the meantime, at the extremity of the place, near the garden, a field-hospital is formed by the kindness and charity of the people. A young surgeon, known as such by the profusion of instruments which surround him, has the wounded men and women brought to him; he bandages their wounds, and while he tends them, he speaks to them in words which rather express hatred for the cause than pity for the effect.

To his two robust assistants, who pass the sufferers in bloody review before him, he cries incessantly:

"The women of the people, the men of the people, first! They can be easily recognised; they are almost always more severely wounded, certainly always less richly dressed."

At these words, repeated after each dressing with a shrill monotony, a young man who, torch in hand, is seeking among the dead, has twice already raised his head. From a large wound which furrows his forehead a few drops of crimson blood are falling. One of his arms is supported by his coat, which he has buttoned over it; and his countenance, covered with perspiration, betrays deep and absorbing emotion.

At these words of the surgeon, which he has heard as we have said for the second time, he raises his head, and looking sadly on the mutilated limbs which the operator seems almost to gloat over:

"Oh, sir," said he, "why do you make a choice among the victims?"

"Because," replied the surgeon, raising his head at this interruption, "because no one will care for the poor if I do not think of them, and the

rich are always well looked after. Lower your lantern, and search upon the ground; you will find a hundred poor people for one rich or noble. In this catastrophe, with a good fortune which will in the end weary even Providence, the noble and the rich have paid the tribute they generally pay—one in a thousand."

The young man raised his torch to a level with his bleeding forehead.

"Then I am that one," said he, without the least anger; "I, a gentleman, lost among so many others in the crowd, wounded in the forehead by a horse's hoof, and my left arm broken by falling into a pit. You say that the noble and the rich are sought after and cared for; you see plainly, however, that my wounds are not yet dressed."

"You have your hotel; your physician. Return home, since you can walk."

"I do not ask for your cares, sir; I seek my sister, a beautiful young girl of sixteen—killed probably, alas! though she is not of the people. She wore a white dress, and a chain with a cross round her neck. Though she has her hotel and her physician, answer me, for pity's sake, sir, have you seen her whom I seek?"

"Sir," said the young surgeon, with a feverish vehemence which showed that the ideas he expressed had long boiled within his breast, "sir, humanity is my guide. It is to her service I devote myself; and when I leave the noble on their bed of death to assist the suffering people, I obey the true laws of humanity, who is my goddess All this day's misfortunes have been caused by you. They arose from your abuses, from your usurpations. Therefore, bear the consequences. No, sir, I have not seen your sister."

And after this harsh apostrophe, the operator returned to his task. A poor woman had just been brought to him, whose two legs were fractured by a carriage.

"See!" he exclaimed, calling after Philip, who was rushing away, "see! do the poor bring their carriages to the public festivals to break the legs of the rich?"

Philip, who belonged to that class of the young nobility from which sprung the Lafayettes and Lamoths, had often professed the same maxims which terrified him in the mouth of this young man, and their application recoiled upon him like a judgment. His heart bursting with grief, he left the neighbourhood of the hospital and continued his sad search. He had not proceeded many steps, when, carried away by his grief, he could not repress a heart-rending cry of:

"Andrée! Andrée!"

At that moment there passed by him, walking with hasty steps, a man already advanced in years, dressed in a grey cloth coat and milled stockings, his right hand resting on a stick, while with the left he held one of those lanterns made of a candle enclosed in oiled paper.

Hearing Philip's cry of grief, he guessed what he must be suffering, and murmured:

"Poor young man!"

But as he seemed to have come for the same purpose as himself, he passed on. Then all at once, as if he reproached himself for having passed unheeding by so much suffering, without attempting to console it:

"Sir," said he, "pardon me for mingling my grief with yours; but those who are struck by the same blow should lean on each other for support. Besides, you may be useful to me. You have already sought for a considerable time, I see, as your light is nearly extinguished, and you must therefore be acquainted with the most fatal localities of the Place."

"Oh yes, sir, I know them!"

"Well, I also seek some one."

"Then look first in the great ditch; you will find more than fifty corpses there."

"Fifty! Just heaven! So many victims killed at a fête!"

"So many! Sir, I have already looked at a thousand faces, and have not yet found my sister."

"Your sister?"

"It was yonder, in that direction, that she was. I lost her near the bench. I have found the place since, but no trace of her was visible. I am about to recommence the search, beginning with the bastion."

"To which side did the crowd rush, sir?"

"Towards the new buildings, in the Rue de la Madeleine."

"Then it must have been towards this side?"

"Yes, and I therefore searched on this side first; but there were dreadful scenes here. Besides, although the tide flowed in that direction, a poor bewildered woman soon loses her senses in such a scene: she knows not whither she goes, and endeavours to escape in the first direction that presents itself."

"Sir, it is not probable that she would struggle against the current. I am about to search the streets on this side; come with me, and, both together, we may perhaps find——"

"And whom do you seek? Your son?" asked Philip, timidly.

"No, sir; but a child whom I had almost adopted."

"And you allowed him to come alone?"

"Oh! he is a young man of eighteen or nineteen. He is master of his own actions; and as he wished to come, I could not hinder him. Besides, we were far from expecting this horrible catastrophe! But your light is going out."

"Yes, sir, I see it."

"Come with me; I will light you."

"Thank you—you are very good; but I fear I shall incommode you."

"Oh, do not fear, since I must have searched for myself. The poor child generally came home very punctually," continued the old man, proceeding in the direction of the streets; "but this evening I felt a sort of foreboding. I waited up for him; it was already eleven o'clock, when my wife heard of the misfortunes of this fête from a neighbour. I waited for two hours longer, still hoping that he would return. Then, as he did not appear, I thought it would be base and cowardly in me to sleep without having news of him."

"Then we are going towards the houses?" asked the young man.

"Yes; you said the crowd must have rushed to this side, and it certainly has done so. The unfortunate boy had doubtless been carried this way also! He is from the provinces, and is alike ignorant of the usages and the localities of this great town. Probably this was the first time he had ever been in the Place Louis XV."

"Alas! my sister is also from the provinces, sir."

"What a fearful sight!" said the old man, turning away from a group of corpses clasped together in death.

"Yet it is there we must look," replied the young man, resolutely holding his light over the heap of dead.

"Oh! I shudder to look at it, for I am a simple and unsophisticated man, and the sight of destruction causes in me an unconquerable horror."

"I had the same horror; but this evening I have served my apprentice-

ship to butchery and death! Hold, here is a young man of about eighteen; he has been suffocated, for I see no wounds. Is it he whom you seek?"

The old man made an effort, and held his lantern close to the body.

"No, sir," said he, "no; my child is younger, has black hair, and pale complexion."

"Alas! all are pale to-night," replied Philip.

"Oh! see," said the old man, "here we are, at the foot of the Garde Meuble. Look at these tokens of the struggle. This blood upon the walls, these shreds of garments upon the iron bars, these torn dresses on the points of the railing!"

"It was here—it was certainly here," murmured Philip.

"What sufferings!"

"Oh, heavens!"

"What?"

"Something white under these corpses! My sister had a white dress on. Lend me your lamp, sir, I beseech you."

In fact, Philip had seen and snatched a shred of white cloth. He let go his hold, having but one hand to take the lamp.

"It is a fragment of a woman's dress, held firmly in a young man's hand," cried he; "of a white dress like my sister's. Oh! Andrée! Andrée!" And the young man uttered heart-rending sobs. The old man now approached.

"It is he!" exclaimed he, opening his arms.

This exclamation attracted the young man's attention.

"Gilbert!" exclaimed Philip in his turn.

"You know Gilbert, sir?"

"Is it Gilbert whom you seek?"

These two questions were uttered simultaneously. The old man seized Gilbert's hand; it was as cold as death. Philip opened the young man's dress, pushed aside the shirt, and placed his hand upon his heart.

"Poor Gilbert!" said he.

"My dear child!" sobbed the old man.

"He breathes!—he lives. He lives, I tell you!" exclaimed Philip.

"Oh! do you think so?"

"I am certain of it—his heart beats."

"It is true," replied the old man. "Help! help! There is a surgeon yonder."

"Oh! let us succour him ourselves, sir; just now I asked that man for help, and he refused me."

"He must help my child!" cried the old man, indignantly. "He *must*. Assist me, sir, to carry Gilbert to him."

"I have only one arm, but it is at your service, sir," replied Philip.

"And I, old as I am, feel strong again! Come!"

The old man seized Gilbert by the shoulders; the young man took his two feet under his right arm, and in this manner they advanced towards the group in the midst of which the surgeon was operating.

"Help! help!" cried the old man.

"The men of the people first! The men of the people first!" replied the surgeon, faithful to his maxim, and sure, each time he replied thus, of exciting a murmur of applause among the group which surrounded him.

"It is a man of the people whom I am bringing," replied the old man, with vehemence, but beginning to share in the general admiration which the firm and resolute tone of the young operator excited.

"After the women, then," said the surgeon; "men have more strength to support pain than women."

"A simple bleeding will suffice, sir," replied the old man.

"Oh! is it you again, my young nobleman?" said the surgeon, perceiving Philip before he saw the old man.

Philip did not reply. The old man thought that these words were addressed to him.

"I am not a nobleman," said he, "I am a man of the people; my name is Jean Jacques Rousseau."

The doctor gave a cry of astonishment, and making an imperative gesture:

"Give place," said he, "to the man of nature! Make room for the emancipator of the human race! Place for the citizen of Geneva!"

"Thanks, sir," said Rousseau, "thanks!"

"Has any accident happened to you?" asked the young doctor.

"Not to me, but to this poor child. See!"

"Ah! you too," cried the physician, "you too, like myself, represent the cause of humanity."

Rousseau, deeply moved by this unexpected triumph, could only stammer forth some almost unintelligible words. Philip, dumb with astonishment at finding himself in the presence of the philosopher whom he admired so highly, remained standing apart. Those who stood around assisted Rousseau to lay the fainting Gilbert upon the table. It was at this moment that the old man glanced at the person whose assistance he was imploring. He was a young man about Gilbert's age, but his features presented no appearance of youth. His sallow complexion was withered like that of an old man; his heavy and drooping eyelids covered an eye like a serpent's, and his mouth was distorted as if in an epileptic fit.

His sleeves turned back to the elbow, his arms covered with blood, surrounded by lifeless and bleeding limbs, he seemed more like an executioner at work, and glorying in his task, than a physician accomplishing his sad and holy mission.

Nevertheless, Rousseau's name seemed to have had so much influence over him as to cause him to lay aside for an instant his usual brutality; he gently opened Gilbert's sleeve, tied a band of linen round his arm, and opened the vein.

The blood flowed at first drop by drop, but after some moments the pure and generous current of youth spouted forth freely.

"Ha! we shall save him," said the operator. "But he will require great care; his chest has been rudely pressed."

"I have now to thank you, sir," said Rousseau, "and praise you, not for the exclusive preference you show for the poor, but for your care and kindness towards them. All men are brothers."

"Even the noble, even the aristocrats, even the rich?" asked the surgeon, his piercing eye flashing from beneath his heavy eyelid.

"Even the noble, the aristocrats, the rich, when they suffer," said Rousseau.

"Sir," said the operator, "excuse me. I am from Baudry, near Neufchatel; I am a Switzer like yourself, and therefore a democrat."

"A countryman?" cried Rousseau, "a native of Switzerland! Your name, sir, if you please?"

"An obscure name, sir; the name of a retiring man who devotes his life to study, waiting till he may, like yourself, devote it to the good of humanity. My name is Jean Paul Marat."

"Thanks, Monsieur Marat," said Rousseau. "But whilst enlightening the people as to their rights, do not excite them to vengeance; for if they should ever revenge themselves, you will perhaps be terrified at their reprisals."

Marat smiled a fearful smile. "Oh! if that day should happen during my life!" said he; "if I could only have the happiness to witness it!"

Rousseau heard these words, and, alarmed at the tone in which they were uttered, as a traveller trembles at the first mutterings of the far-distant thunder, he took Gilbert in his arms, and attempted to carry him away.

"Two volunteers to help Monsieur Rousseau! Two men of the people!" cried the surgeon.

"Here! here! here!" cried twenty voices simultaneously.

Rousseau had only to choose; he pointed to the two strongest, who took the youth up in their arms.

As he was leaving the place he passed Philip.

"Here, sir," said he, "I have no more use for the lantern; take it."

"Thank you, sir," said Philip; "many thanks."

He seized the lantern, and while Rousseau once more took the way to the Rue Plastrière, he continued his search.

"Poor young man!" murmured Rousseau, turning back, and seeing Philip disappear in the blocked-up and encumbered streets. He proceeded on his way shuddering, for he still heard the shrill voice of the surgeon echoing over the field of blood, and crying:

"The men of the people! None but the men of the people! Woe to the noble, to the rich, to the aristocrats!"

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE RETURN.

WHILE the countless catastrophes we have mentioned were rapidly succeeding each other, M. de Taverney escaped all these dangers as if by a miracle.

Unable to oppose any physical resistance to the devouring force which swept away everything in its passage, but at the same time calm and collected, he had succeeded in maintaining his position in the centre of a group which was rolling onward towards the Rue de la Madeleine. This group, crushed against the parapet walls of the Place, ground against the angles of the Garde Meuble, had left a long trail of wounded and dead in its path; but, decimated as it was, it had yet succeeded in conducting the remnant of its number to a place of safety. When this was accomplished, the handful of men and women who had been left, dispersed themselves over the boulevards with cries of joy, and M. de Taverney found himself, like his companions, completely out of danger

What we are about to say would be difficult to believe, had we not already so frankly sketched the character of the baron. During the whole of this fearful passage, M. de Taverney—may God forgive him!—had absolutely thought only of himself. Besides that he was not of a very affectionate disposition, he was a man of action; and, in the great crises of life, such characters always put the adage of Cæsar's, "age quod agis," in practice. We shall not say, therefore, that M. de Taverney was utterly selfish, we shall merely admit that he was absent. But once upon the pavement of the boulevards, once more master of his actions, sensible of having escaped from death to life, satisfied, in short, of his safety, the baron gave a deep sigh of satisfaction, followed by a cry—feeble and wailing—a cry of grief.

"My daughter!" said he, "my daughter!" and he remained motionless,

his hands fell by his side, his eyes were fixed and glassy, while he searched his memory for all the particulars of their separation.

"Poor dear man!" murmured some compassionate women.

A group had collected around the baron, ready to pity, but above all to question. But M. de Taverney had no popular instincts; he felt ill at ease in the centre of this compassionate group, and making a successful effort, he broke through them, and, we say it to his praise, made a few steps towards the Place.

But these few steps were the unreflecting movement of paternal love, which is never entirely extinguished in the heart of man. Reason immediately came to the baron's aid and arrested his steps.

We will follow, with the reader's permission, the course of his reasoning. First, the impossibility of returning to the Place Louis XV. occurred to him. In it there was only confusion and death, and the crowds which were still rushing from it would have rendered any attempt to pass through them as futile as for the swimmer to seek to ascend the fall of the Rhine at Schaffhausen. Besides, even if a Divine arm enabled him to reach the Place, how could he hope to find one woman among a hundred thousand women? And why should he expose himself again, and fruitlessly, to a death from which he had so miraculously escaped?

Then came hope, that light which ever gilds the clouds of the darkest night. Was not Andrée near Philip, resting on his arm, protected by his manly strength and his brother's heart?

That he, the baron, a feeble and tottering old man, should have been carried away, was very natural; but that Philip, with his ardent, vigorous, hopeful nature—Philip, with his arm of iron—Philip, responsible for his sister's safety—should be so, was impossible. Philip had struggled and must have conquered.

The baron, like all selfish men, endowed Philip with those qualities which his selfishness denied to himself, but which nevertheless he sought in others—strength, generosity, and valour. For one selfish man regards all other selfish men as rivals and enemies, who rob him of those advantages which he believes he has the right of reaping from society.

M. de Taverney, being thus reassured by the force of his own arguments, concluded that Philip had naturally saved his sister; that he had perhaps lost some time in seeking his father to save him also, but that probably, nay, certainly, he had taken the way to the Rue Coq-Heron, to conduct Andrée, who must be a little alarmed by all the scene, home.

He therefore wheeled round, and descending the Rue des Capucines, he gained the Place des Conquêtes, or Louis le Grand, now called the Place des Victoires.

But scarcely had the baron arrived within twenty paces of the hotel, when Nicole, placed as sentinel on the threshold, where she was chattering with some companions, exclaimed: "And Monsieur Philip? and Mademoiselle Andrée? What has become of them?" For all Paris was already informed by the earliest fugitives of the catastrophe, which their terror had even exaggerated.

"Oh heavens!" cried the baron, a little agitated, "have they not returned, Nicole?"

"No, no, sir, they have not been seen."

"They most probably have been obliged to make a detour," replied the baron, trembling more and more in proportion as the calculations of his logic were demolished; and he remained standing in the street waiting in his turn along with Nicole, who was sobbing, and La Brie, who raised his clasped hands to heaven.

"Ah! here is M. Philip!" exclaimed Nicole, in a tone of indescribable terror, for Philip was alone.

And in the darkness of the night, Philip was seen running towards them, breathless and despairing.

"Is my sister here?" cried he, while yet at a distance, as soon as he could see the group assembled at the door of the hotel.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed the baron, pale and trembling.

"Andrée! Andrée!" cried the young man, approaching nearer and nearer; "where is Andrée?"

"We have not seen her; she is not here, Monsieur Philip. Oh heavens! my dear young lady!" cried Nicole, bursting into tears.

"And yet you have returned?" said the baron, in a tone of anger, which must seem to the reader the more unjust, that we have already made him acquainted with the secrets of his logic.

Philip, instead of replying, approached and showed his bleeding face, and his arm, broken and hanging at his side like a withered branch.

"Alas! alas!" sighed the old man, "Andrée! my poor Andrée!" and he sunk back upon the stone bench beside the door.

"I will find her, living or dead!" exclaimed Philip gloomily. And he again started off with feverish activity. Without slackening his pace, he secured his left arm in the opening of his vest, for this useless limb would have fettered his movements in the crowd, and if he had had a hatchet at that moment, he would have struck it off. It was then that he met on that fatal field of the dead, Rousseau, Gilbert, and the fierce and gloomy operator who, covered with blood, seemed rather an infernal demon presiding over the massacre, than a beneficent genius appearing to succour and to help. During a great portion of the night Philip wandered over the Place Louis XV., unable to tear himself away from the walls of the Garde Meuble, near which Gilbert had been found, and incessantly gazing at the piece of white muslin which the young man had held firmly grasped in his hand.

But when the first light of day appeared, worn-out, ready to sink among the heaps of corpses scarcely paler than himself, seized with a strange giddiness, and hoping, as his father had hoped, that Andrée might have returned or been carried back to the house, Philip bent his steps once more towards the Rue Coq-Heron. While still at a distance he saw the same group he had left there, and guessing at once that Andrée had not returned, he stopped. The baron, on his side, had recognised his son.

"Well?" cried he.

"What! has my sister not returned?" asked the young man.

"Alas!" cried, with one voice, the baron, Nicole, and La Brie.

"Nothing—no news—no information—no hope?"

"Nothing?"

Philip fell upon the stone bench of the hotel; the baron uttered a savage exclamation.

At this very moment a hackney-coach appeared at the end of the street; it approached slowly, and stopped in front of the hotel. A woman's head was seen through the door, resting on her shoulders, as if she had fainted. Philip, roused by this sight, hastened towards the vehicle. The door of the coach opened, and a man alighted, bearing the senseless form of Andrée his arms.

"Dead! dead!—They bring us her corpse!" cried Philip, falling on his knees.

"Dead!" stammered the baron, "oh, sir, is she indeed dead?"

"I think not, gentlemen," calmly replied the man who carried Andrée; "Mademoiselle de Taverney, I hope, is only in a swoon."

"Oh! the sorcerer, the sorcerer!" cried the baron.

"The Count de Balsamo!" murmured Philip.

"The same, sir, and truly happy in having recognised Mademoiselle de Taverney in this frightful mêlée."

"In what part of it, sir?" asked Philip.

"Near the Garde Meuble."

"Yes," said Philip. Then, his expression of joy changing suddenly to one of gloomy distrust,—

"You bring her back very late, count," said he.

"Sir," replied Balsamo, without seeming in the least surprised, "you may easily comprehend my embarrassing situation. I did not know your sister's address, and I had no resource but to take her to the Marchioness de Sévigny's, a friend of mine who lives near the royal stables. Then this honest fellow whom you see, and who assisted me to rescue the young lady—come hither, Courtois." Balsamo accompanied these last words by a sign, and a man in the royal livery appeared from the coach. "Then," continued Balsamo, "this worthy fellow, who belongs to the royal stables, recognised the young lady as having one evening driven her from Muette to your hotel. Mademoiselle Taverney owes this lucky recognition to her marvellous beauty. I made him accompany me in the coach, and I have the honour to restore Mademoiselle de Taverney to you with all the respect due to her, and less injured than you think." And as he concluded he gave the young girl into the care of her father and Nicole.

For the first time, the baron felt a tear trembling on his eyelids, and though, no doubt, inwardly surprised at this mark of feeling, he permitted it to roll unheeded down his wrinkled cheeks. Philip held out the only hand he had at liberty to Balsamo.

"Sir," he said, "you know my name and my address. Give me an opportunity of showing my gratitude for the service you have rendered us."

"I have only fulfilled a duty," replied Balsamo. "Do I not owe you hospitality?" And bowing low, he made a few steps to retire, without replying to the baron's invitation to enter. But returning:

"Excuse me," said he, "but I omitted to give you the exact address of the Marchioness de Sévigny. She lives in the Rue St. Honoré, near the Fueillants. I thought it necessary to give you this information, in case Mademoiselle de Taverney should think proper to call on her."

There was in this precision of details, in this accumulation of proofs, a delicacy which touched Philip deeply, and affected even the baron.

"Sir," said the baron, "my daughter owes her life to you."

"I know it, sir, and I feel proud and happy at the thought," replied Balsamo.

And this time, followed by Courtois, who refused Philip's proffered purse, he entered the fiacre, which drove off rapidly.

Almost at the same moment, and as if Balsamo's departure had put an end to her swoon, Andrée opened her eyes, but she remained for some moments mute, bewildered, and with a wild and staring look.

"Oh, heavens!" murmured Philip; "has Providence only half restored her to us? Has her reason fled?"

Andrée seemed to comprehend these words, and shook her head; but she remained silent, and as if under the influence of a sort of ecstacy. She was still standing, and one of her arms was extended in the direction of the street by which Balsamo had disappeared.

"Come, come," said the baron; "it is time to put an end to all this. Assist your sister into the house, Philip."

The young man supported Andrée with his uninjured arm, Nicole sustained her on the other side; and, walking on, but after the manner of a sleeping person, she entered the hotel and gained her apartments. There, for the first time, the power of speech returned.

"Philip! My father!" said she.

"She recognises us! she knows us again!" exclaimed Philip.

"Of course, I know you again; but oh, heavens! what has happened?"

And Andrée closed her eyes, but this time not in a swoon, but in a calm and peaceful slumber.

Nicole, left alone with her young mistress, undressed her and put her in bed.

When Philip returned to his apartments, he found there a physician whom the thoughtful La Brie had run to summon, as soon as the anxiety on Andrée's account had subsided.

The doctor examined Philip's arm. It was not broken, but only dislocated, and a skilful compression replaced the shoulder in the socket from which it had been removed. After the operation, Philip, who was still uneasy on his sister's account, conducted the doctor to her bedside.

The doctor felt her pulse, listened to her breathing, and smiled.

"Your sister sleeps as calmly as an infant," said he. "Let her sleep, chevalier; there is nothing else necessary to be done."

As for the baron, sufficiently reassured on his children's account, he had long been sound asleep.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

M. DE JUSSIEU.

WE must again transport the reader to the house in the Rue Plastrière where M. de Sartines had sent his agent, and there, on the morning of the 31st of May, we shall once more find Gilbert stretched upon a mattress in Therese's room, and, standing around him, Therese and Rousseau with several of their neighbours, contemplating this specimen of the dreadful event at the remembrance of which all Paris still shuddered.

Gilbert, pale and bleeding, opened his eyes; and, as soon as he regained his consciousness, he endeavoured to raise himself and look round as if he were still in the Place Louis XV. An expression of profound anxiety, followed by one of triumphant joy, was pictured in his features; then a second cloud flitted across his countenance, which resumed its sombre hue.

"Are you suffering, my dear child?" inquired Rousseau, taking his hand affectionately.

"Oh! who has saved me?" asked Gilbert. "Who thought of me, lonely and friendless being that I am?"

"What saved you, my child, was the happy chance that you were not yet dead. He who thought of you was the same Almighty Being who thinks of all."

"No matter; it is very imprudent," grumbled Therese, "to go among such a crowd."

"Yes, yes, it is very imprudent," repeated all the neighbours with one voice.

"THE YOUNG MAN SUPPORTED ANDRÉE WITH HIS UNINJURED ARM, NICOLE SUSTAINED HER ON THE OTHER SIDE."

"Why, ladies," interrupted Rousseau, "there is no imprudence when there is no manifest danger, and there is no manifest danger in going to see fireworks. When danger arrives under such circumstances, you do not call the sufferer imprudent, but unfortunate. Any of us present would have done the same."

Gilbert looked round, and seeing himself in Rousseau's apartment, endeavoured to speak; but the effort was too much for him, the blood gushed from his mouth and nostrils, and he sank back insensible. Rousseau had been warned by the surgeon of the Place Louis XV., and was therefore not alarmed. In expectation of a similar event, he had placed the invalid on a temporary mattress without sheets.

"In the mean time," said he to Therese. "you may put the poor lad to bed."

"Where?"

"Why here, in my bed."

Gilbert heard these words. Extreme weakness alone prevented his replying immediately, but he made a violent effort, and, opening his eyes, said, slowly and painfully, "No, no; upstairs."

"You wish to return to your own room?"

"Yes, yes, if you please;" and he completed with his eyes, rather than with his tongue, this wish, dictated by a recollection still more powerful than pain, and which with him seemed to survive even his consciousness.

Rousseau, whose own sensibility was so extreme, doubtless understood him, for he added:

"It is well, my child; we will carry you up. He does not wish to inconvenience us," said he to Therese, who had warmly applauded the resolution. It was therefore decided that Gilbert should be instantly installed in the attic he preferred.

Towards the middle of the day, Rousseau came to pass the hours he usually spent in collecting his favourite plants by the bedside of his disciple; and the young man, feeling a little better, related to him, in a low and almost inaudible voice, the details of the catastrophe. But he did not mention the real cause why he went to see the fireworks. Curiosity alone, he said, led him to the Place Louis XV. Rousseau could not suspect anything farther, unless he had been a sorcerer, and he therefore expressed no surprise at Gilbert's story, but contented himself with the questions he had already put, and only recommended patience. He did not speak either of the fragment of muslin which had been found in Gilbert's hand, and of which Philip had taken possession.

Nevertheless, this conversation, which, on both sides, bordered so narrowly on the real feelings of each, was no less attractive on that account; and they were still deeply absorbed in it, when, all at once, Therese's step was heard upon the landing.

"Jacques!" said she, "Jacques!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Some prince coming to visit me, in my turn," said Gilbert, with a feeble smile.

"Jacques!" cried Therese, advancing and still calling.

"Well! What do you want with me?"

Therese entered.

"M. de Jussieu is below," said she; "he heard that you were in the crowd during that night, and he has come to see if you have been hurt."

"The good Jussieu!" said Rousseau. "Excellent man, like all those who, from taste or from necessity, commune with nature, the source of all good. Be calm, do not move, Gilbert; I will return."

"Yes, thank you," said the young man.

Rousseau left the room.

But scarcely was he gone when Gilbert, raising himself as well as he could, dragged himself towards the skylight from which Andrée's window could be seen.

It was a most painful effort for a young man without strength, almost without the power of thought, to raise himself upon the stool, lift the sash of the skylight, and prop himself upon the edge of the roof. Gilbert, nevertheless, succeeded in effecting this, but once there, his eyes swam, his hand shook, the blood rushed to his lips, and he fell heavily upon the floor.

At that moment the door of the garret was opened, and Rousseau entered, followed by Jussieu, to whom he was paying great civility.

"Take care, my dear philosopher; stoop a little here," said Rousseau. "There is a step there—we are not entering a palace."

"Thank you; I have good eyes and stout limbs," replied the learned botanist.

"Here is some one come to visit you, my little Gilbert," said Rousseau, looking towards the bed. "Oh! good heavens! where is he? He has got up, the unfortunate lad!"

And Rousseau, seeing the window open, commenced to vent his displeasure in affectionate grumblings. Gilbert raised himself with difficulty, and said, in an almost inaudible voice, "I wanted air."

It was impossible to scold him, for suffering was plainly depicted in his pale and altered features.

"In fact," interrupted M. de Jussieu, "it is dreadfully warm here. Come, young man, let me feel your pulse; I am also a doctor."

"And better than many regular physicians," said Rousseau, "for you are a healer of the mind as well as of the body."

"It is too much honour——" murmured Gilbert feebly, endeavouring to shroud himself from view in his humble pallet.

"M. de Jussieu insisted on visiting you," said Rousseau, "and I accepted his offer. Well, dear doctor, what do you think of his chest?"

The skilful anatomist felt the bones, and sounded the cavity by an attentive auscultation.

"The vital parts are uninjured," said he. "But who has pressed you in his arms with so much force?"

"Alas! sir, it was death!" said Gilbert.

Rousseau looked at the young man with astonishment.

"Oh! you are bruised, my child, greatly bruised; but tonics, air, leisure will make all that disappear."

"No leisure; I cannot afford it," said the young man, looking at Rousseau.

"What does he mean?" asked Jussieu.

"Gilbert is a determined worker, my dear sir," replied Rousseau.

"Agreed; but he cannot possibly work for a day or two yet."

"To obtain a livelihood," said Gilbert, "one must work every day; for every day one eats."

"Oh! you will not consume much food for a short time, and your medicine will not cost much."

"However little they cost, sir," said Gilbert, "I never receive alms."

"You are mad," said Rousseau, "and you exaggerate. I tell you that you must be governed by M. de Jussieu's orders, who will be your doctor in spite of yourself. Would you believe it," continued he, addressing M. de Jussieu, "he has begged me not to send for one?"

"Why not?"

"Because it would have cost me money, and he is proud."

"But," replied M. de Jussieu, gazing at Gilbert's fine expressive features with growing interest, "no matter how proud he is, he cannot accomplish impossibilities. Do you think yourself capable of working, when you fell down with the mere exertion of going to the window?"

"It is true," sighed Gilbert, "I am weak; I know it."

"Well, then, take repose, and, above all, mentally. You are the guest of a man whom all men obey, except his guest."

Rousseau, delighted at this delicate compliment from so great a man, took his hand and pressed it.

"And then," continued M. de Jussieu, "you will become an object of particular care to the king and the princes."

"I!" exclaimed Gilbert.

"You, a poor victim of that unfortunate evening. The dauphin, when he heard the news, uttered cries of grief; and the dauphiness, who was going to Marly, remained at Trianon to be more within reach of the unfortunate sufferers."

"Oh, indeed!" said Rousseau.

"Yes, my dear philosopher; and nothing is spoken of but the letter written by the dauphin to M. de Sartines."

"I have not heard of it."

"It is at once simple and touching. The dauphin receives a monthly pension of two thousand crowns. This morning his month's income had not been paid. The prince walked to and fro quite alarmed, asked for the treasurer several times, and as soon as the latter brought him the money, sent it instantly to Paris with two charming lines to M. de Sartines, who has just shown them to me."

"Ah, then you have seen M. de Sartines to-day?" said Rousseau, with a kind of uneasiness, or rather distrust.

"Yes; I have just left him," replied M. de Jussieu, rather embarrassed. "I had to ask him for some seeds. So that," added he quickly, "the dauphiness remained at Versailles to tend her sick and wounded."

"Her sick and wounded?" asked Rousseau.

"Yes; Monsieur Gilbert is not the only one who has suffered. This time the lower classes have only paid a partial quota to the accident; it is said that there are many noble persons among the wounded."

Gilbert listened with inexpressible eagerness and anxiety. It seemed to him that every moment the name of Andrée would be pronounced by the illustrious naturalist. But M. de Jussieu rose.

"So our consultation is over?" said Rousseau.

"And henceforward our science will be useless with regard to this young invalid; air, moderate exercise, the woods—ah! by-the-bye, I was forgetting——"

"What?"

"Next Sunday I am to make a botanical excursion to the forest of Marly; will you accompany me, my illustrious fellow-labourer?"

"Oh!" replied Rousseau, "say rather your unworthy admirer."

"Parbleu! that will be a fine opportunity for giving our invalid a walk. Bring him."

"So far?"

"The distance is nothing; besides, my carriage takes me as far as Bougival, and I can give you a seat. We will go by the Princess's Road to Luciennes, and from thence proceed to Marly. Botanists stop every

moment; our invalid will carry our camp-stools; you and I will gather samples; he will gather health."

"What an amiable man you are, my dear Jussieu!" said Rousseau.

"Never mind; it is for my own interest. You have, I know, a great work ready upon mosses, and as I am feeling my way a little on the same subject you will guide me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Rousseau, whose satisfaction was apparent in spite of himself.

"And when there," added the botanist, "we shall have a little breakfast in the open air, and shall enjoy the shade and the beautiful flowers. It is settled?"

"Oh, certainly."

"For Sunday, then?"

"Delightful. It seems to me as if I were fifteen again. I revel beforehand in all the pleasure I have in prospect," replied Rousseau, with almost childish satisfaction.

"And you, my young friend, must get stronger on your legs in the meantime."

Gilbert stammered out some words of thanks, which M. Jussieu did not hear, and the two botanists left Gilbert alone with his thoughts, and above all with his fears.

CHAPTER LXIX.

LIFE RETURNS.

In the meantime, whilst Rousseau believed his invalid to be on the high road to health, and whilst Therese informed all her neighbours that, thanks to the prescriptions of the learned doctor, M. de Jussieu, Gilbert was entirely out of danger, during this period of general confidence the young man incurred the worst danger he had yet run, by his obstinacy and his perpetual reveries. Rousseau could not be so confident, but that he entertained in his inmost thoughts a distrust solidly founded on philosophical reasonings.

Knowing Gilbert to be in love, and having caught him in open rebellion to medical authority, he judged that he would again commit the same faults if he gave him too much liberty. Therefore, like a good father, he had closed the padlock of Gilbert's attic more carefully than ever, tacitly permitting him meanwhile to go to the window, but carefully preventing his crossing the threshold. It may easily be imagined what rage this solicitude, which changed his garret into a prison, aroused in Gilbert's breast, and what hosts of projects crowded his teeming brain. To many minds constraint is fruitful in inventions. Gilbert now thought only of Andrée, of the happiness of seeing and watching over the progress of her convalescence, even from afar; but Andrée did not appear at the windows of the pavilion, and Gilbert, when he fixed his ardent and searching looks on the opposite apartments, or surveyed every nook and corner of the building, could only see Nicole carrying the invalid's draught on a porcelain plate, or M. de Taverney surveying the garden, and vigorously taking snuff, as if to clear and refresh his intellect. Still these details tranquillised him, for they betokened illness, but not death.

"There," thought he, "beyond that door, behind that blind, breathes, sighs, and suffers, she whom I adore, whom I idolise—she whose very

sight would cause the perspiration to stand upon my forehead and make my limbs tremble—she to whose existence mine is for ever riveted—she for whom alone I breathe and live !"

And then, leaning forward out of his window—so that the inquisitive Chon thought, twenty times in an hour, that he would throw himself out—Gilbert, with his practised eye, took the measure of the partitions, of the floors, of the depth of the pavilion, and constructed an exact plan of them in his brain. There M. de Taverney slept ; there must be the kitchen ; there Philip's apartments ; there the cabinet occupied by Nicole ; and, last of all, there must be Andrée's chamber—the sanctuary at the door of which he would have given his life to remain for one day kneeling.

This sanctuary, according to Gilbert's plan, was a large apartment on the ground-floor, guarded by an ante-chamber, from which opened a small cabinet with a glass-door, which, agreeably to Gilbert's arrangement, served as Nicole's sleeping-chamber.

"Oh !" exclaimed the excited youth, in his fits of jealous fury, "how happy are the beings who are privileged to walk in the garden on which my window and those of the staircase look. How happy those thoughtless mortals who tread the gravel of the parterre ! For there, during the silence of night, may be heard Mademoiselle Andrée's plaints and sighs."

Between the formation of a wish and its accomplishment there is a wide gulf ; but fertile imaginations can throw a bridge across. They can find the real in the impossible ; they know how to cross the broadest rivers and scale the highest mountains, by a plan peculiarly their own.

For the first few days Gilbert contented himself with wishing. Then he reflected that these much envied, happy beings were simple mortals, endowed, as he was, with limbs to tread the soil of the garden, and with arms to open the doors. Then, by degrees, he pictured to himself the happiness there would be in secretly gliding into this forbidden house—in pressing his ears against the Venetian blinds, through which the sounds from the interior were, as it were, filtered. With Gilbert, wishing did not long suffice ; the fulfilment must be immediate.

Besides, his strength returned rapidly ; youth is fruitful and rich. At the end of three days, his veins still throbbing with feverish excitement, Gilbert felt himself as strong as he had ever been in his life.

He calculated that, as Rousseau had locked him in, one of the greatest difficulties—that of obtaining an entrance into the hotel of the Taverneys by the street-door—was placed out of the question ; for, as the entrance-door opened upon the Rue Coq-Heron, and as Gilbert was locked up in the Rue Plastrière, he could not of course reach any street, and had therefore no need to open any doors. There remained the windows. That of his garret looked down upon a perpendicular wall of forty-eight feet in depth.

No one, unless he were drunk or mad, would venture to descend it. "Oh ! those doors are happy inventions after all," thought he, clenching his hands, "and yet Monsieur Rousseau, a philosopher, locks them !"

To break the padlock ! That would be easily done ; but if so, adieu to the hospitable roof which had sheltered him.

To escape from Luciennes, from the Rue Plastrière, from Taverney—always to escape, would be to render himself unable to look a single creature in the face without fearing to meet the reproach of ingratitude.

"No !" thought he, "Monsieur Rousseau shall know nothing of it."

Leaning out of his window, Glibert continued :

"With my hands and my legs, those instruments granted to free men by

nature, I will creep along the tiles, and, keeping in the spout—which is narrow indeed, but straight, and therefore the direct road from one end to the other—I shall arrive, if I get on so far, at the skylight parallel to this. Now, this skylight belongs to the stairs. If I do not reach so far, I shall fall into the garden; that will make a noise, people will hasten from the pavilion, will raise me up, will recognise me, and I die nobly, poetically, pitied! That would be glorious!

"If I arrive, as everything leads me to believe I shall, I will creep in under the skylight over the stairs, and descend bare-footed to the first story, the window of which also opens in the garden, at fifteen feet from the ground. I jump. Alas, my strength, my activity are gone! It is true that there is an espalier to assist me. Yes, but this espalier with its rotten framework will break, I shall tumble down, not killed nobly and poetically, but whitened with plaster, my clothes torn, ashamed, and looking as if I had come to rob the orchard! Odious thought! M. de Taverney will order the porter to flog me, or La Brie to pull my ears.

"No! I have here twenty packthreads, which, twisted together, will make a rope, according to Monsieur Rousseau's definition that many straws make a sheaf. I shall borrow all these packthreads from Madame Therese for one night, I shall knot them together, and when I have reached the window on the first floor, I shall tie the rope to the little balcony, or even to the lead, and slip down into the garden."

When Gilbert had inspected the spout, attached and measured the cords, and calculated the height by his eye, he felt himself strong and determined.

He twisted the pieces of twine together and made a tolerably strong rope of them, then tried its strength by hanging to a beam in his garret, and, happy to find that he had only spat blood once during his efforts, he decided upon the nocturnal expedition.

The better to hoodwink Monsieur Jacques and Therese, he counterfeited illness, and kept his bed until two o'clock, at which time Rousseau went out for his after dinner walk and did not return till the evening. When Rousseau paid a visit to his attic, before setting out, Gilbert announced to him his wish of sleeping until the next morning; to which Rousseau replied, that as he had made an engagement to sup from home that evening, he was happy to find Gilbert inclined to rest.

With these mutual explanations they separated. When Rousseau was gone, Gilbert brought out his packthreads again, and this time he twisted them permanently.

He again examined the spout and the tiles; then placed himself at the window to keep watch on the garden until evening.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE AERIAL TRIP.

GILBERT was now prepared for his entrance into the enemy's camp, for thus he mentally termed M. de Taverney's grounds, and from his window he explored the garden with the care and attention of a skilful strategist who is about to give battle, when, in this calm and motionless mansion, an incident occurred which attracted the philosopher's attention.

A stone flew over the garden wall and struck against the angle of the house. Gilbert, who had already learned that there can be no effect without a cause, determined to discover the cause, having seen the effect.

But although he leaned out as far as possible, he could not discover the

person in the street who had thrown the stone. However, he immediately comprehended that this manœuvre had reference to an event which just then took place ; one of the outside shutters of the ground-floor opened cautiously, and through the opening appeared Nicole's head.

On seeing Nicole, Gilbert made a plunge back in his garret, but without losing sight of the nimble young girl. The latter, after throwing a stealthy glance at all the windows, particularly at those of the pavilion, emerged from her hiding-place and ran towards the garden, as if going to the espalier where some lace was drying in the sun. It was on the path which led towards the espalier that the stone had fallen, and neither Nicole nor Gilbert lost sight of it. Gilbert saw her kick this stone, which for the moment became of such great importance, before her several times, and she continued this manœuvre until she reached the flower border, in which the espalier stood. Once there, Nicole raised her hands to take down the lace, let fall some of it, and, in picking it up again, seized the stone.

As yet Gilbert could understand nothing of this movement, but seeing Nicole pick up the stone as a greedy school-boy picks up a nut, and unroll a slip of paper which was tied round it, he at once guessed the degree of importance which was attached to this aerolite.

It was, in fact, neither more nor less than a note which Nicole had found rolled round the stone. The cunning girl quickly unfolded it, read it, and put it into her pocket, and then immediately discovered that there was no more occasion for looking at the lace ; it was dry.

Meanwhile Gilbert shook his head, saying to himself, with the blind selfishness of men who entertain a bad opinion of women, that Nicole was in reality a viciously inclined person, and that he, Gilbert, had performed an act of sound and moral policy in breaking off so suddenly and so boldly with a girl who had letters thrown to her over the wall.

Nicole ran back to the house, and soon reappeared, this time holding her hand in her pocket. She drew from it a key, which Gilbert saw glitter in her hand for a moment, and then the young girl slipped this key under a little door which served to admit the gardener, and which was situated at the extremity of the wall opposite the street, and parallel to the great door which was generally used.

"Good!" said Gilbert, "I understand—a love-letter and a rendezvous. Nicole loses no time ; she has already a new lover."

And he frowned with the disappointment of a man who thinks that his loss should cause an irreparable void in the heart of the woman he abandons, and who finds this void completely filled.

"This may spoil all my projects," he continued, seeking a factitious cause for his ill-humour. "No matter," resumed he, after a moment's silence, "I shall not be sorry to know the happy mortal who succeeds me in Mademoiselle Nicole's good graces."

But Gilbert, on certain subjects, had a very discerning judgment. He calculated that the discovery which he had made, and which Nicole was far from suspecting, would give him an advantage over her which might be of use to him, since he knew her secret, with such details as she could not deny, while she scarcely suspected his, and, even if she did, there existed no facts which could give a colour to her suspicions. During all these goings and comings, the anxiously expected night had come on.

The only thing which Gilbert now feared was the return of Rousseau, who might surprise him on the roof or on the staircase, or might come up and find his room empty. In the latter case, the anger of the philosopher of Geneva would be terrible, but Gilbert hoped to avert the blow by means

of the following note, which he left upon his little table, addressed to the philosopher :

"MY DEAR AND ILLUSTRIOUS PROTECTOR,—

"Do not think ill of me, if, notwithstanding your recommendations, and even against your order, I have dared to leave my apartment. I shall soon return, unless some accident, similar to that which has already happened to me, should again take place ; but at the risk of a similar, or even a worse accident, I must leave my room for two hours."

"I do not know what I shall say when I return," thought Gilbert ; "but at least Monsieur Rousseau will not be uneasy or angry."

The evening was dark. A suffocating heat prevailed, as it often does during the first warmths of spring. The sky was cloudy, and at half-past eight the most practised eye could have distinguished nothing at the bottom of the dark gulf into which Gilbert peered.

It was then, for the first time, that the young man perceived that he breathed with difficulty, and that sudden perspirations bedewed his forehead and breast—unmistakable signs of a weak and unhinged system. Prudence counselled him not to undertake, in his present condition, an expedition for which strength and steadiness in all his members were peculiarly necessary, not only to ensure success, but even for the preservation of his life ; but Gilbert did not listen to what his physical instincts counselled.

His moral will spoke more loudly ; and to it, as ever, the young man vowed obedience.

The moment had come. Gilbert rolled his rope several times round his neck, and commenced, with beating heart, to scale the skylight ; then, firmly grasping the casement, he made the first step in the spout towards the sky-light on the right, which was, as we have said, that of the staircase, and about two fathoms distance from his own.

His feet in a groove of lead, at the utmost eight inches wide, which groove, though it was supported here and there by holdfasts of iron, yet, from the pliability of the lead, yielded to his steps ; his hands resting against the tiles, which could only be a point of support for his equilibrium, but no help in case of falling, since the fingers could take no hold of them ; this was Gilbert's position during this aerial passage, which lasted two minutes, but which seemed to Gilbert to occupy two centuries.

But Gilbert determined not to be afraid ; and such was the power of will in this young man that he succeeded. He recollected to have heard a rope-dancer say, that to walk safely on narrow ways one ought never to look downwards, but about ten feet in advance, and never think of the abyss beneath, but as an eagle might, that is, with the conviction of being able to float over it at pleasure. Besides, Gilbert had already put these precepts in practice in several visits he had paid to Nicole—that Nicole who was now so bold that she made use of keys and doors instead of roofs and chimneys.

In this manner he had often passed the sluices of the mill at Taverney, and the naked beams of the roof of an old barn. He arrived, therefore, at the goal without a shudder, and once arrived there, he glided beneath the skylight, and with a thrill of joy alighted on the staircase. But on reaching the landing-place he stopped short. Voices were heard on the lower stories ; they were those of Therese and certain neighbours of hers, who were speaking of Rousseau's genius, of the merit of his books, and of the harmony of his music.

The neighbours had read "*La Nouvelle Héloïse*," and confessed frankly that they found the book obscure. In reply to this criticism Madame Therese observed, that they did not understand the philosophical part of this delightful book. To this the neighbours had nothing to reply, except to confess their incompetence to give an opinion on such a subject.

This edifying conversation was held from one landing-place to another; and the fire of discussion, ardent as it was, was less so than that of the stoves on which the savoury suppers of these ladies were cooking. Gilbert was listening to the arguments, therefore, and snuffing the smell of the viands, when his name, pronounced in the midst of the tumult, caused him to start rather unpleasantly.

"After my supper," said Therese, "I must go and see if that dear child does not want something in his attic."

This *dear child* gave Gilbert less pleasure than the promise of the visit gave him alarm. Luckily, he remembered that Therese, when she supped alone, chatted a long time with her bottle, that the meat seemed savoury, and that after supper meant—ten o'clock. It was now only a quarter to nine. Besides, it was probable that, after supper, the course of ideas in Therese's brain would take a change, and that she would then think of anything else rather than of the *dear child*.

But time was slipping past, to the great vexation of Gilbert, when all at once one of the joints of the allied dames began to burn.

The cry of the alarmed cook was heard, which put an end to all conversation, for every one hurried to the theatre of the catastrophe. Gilbert profited by this culinary panic among the ladies to glide down the stairs like a shadow.

Arrived at the first story, he found the leading of the window well adapted to hold his rope, and, attaching it by a slip-knot, he mounted the window-sill and began rapidly to descend.

He was still suspended between the window and the ground, when a rapid step sounded in the garden beneath him. He had sufficient time, before the step reached him, to return, and holding fast by the knots, he watched to see who this untimely visitor was.

It was a man, and as he proceeded from the direction of the little door, Gilbert did not doubt for an instant but that it was the happy mortal whom Nicole was expecting.

He fixed all his attention therefore upon this second intruder, who had thus arrested him in the midst of his perilous descent. By his walk, by a glance at his profile, seen from beneath his three-cornered hat, and by the particular mode in which this hat was placed over the corner of his attentive ear, Gilbert fancied he recognised the famous Beausire, that exempt whose acquaintance Nicole had made in Taverney.

Almost immediately he saw Nicole open the door of the pavilion, hasten into the garden, leaving the door open, and light and active as a bird, direct her steps towards the greenhouse, that is to say, in the direction in which M. Beausire was already advancing.

This was most certainly not the first rendezvous which had taken place, since neither one nor other betrayed the least hesitation as to their place of meeting.

"Now I can finish my descent," thought Gilbert; "for if Nicole has appointed this hour for meeting her lover, it must be because she is certain of being undisturbed. Andrée must be alone then—oh heavens! alone."

In fact, no noise was heard in the house, and only a faint light gleamed from the windows of the ground-floor. Gilbert alighted upon the ground

without any accident, and, unwilling to cross the garden, he glided gently along the wall till he came to a clump of trees, crossed it in a stooping posture, and arrived at the door which Nicole had left open without having been discovered. There, sheltered by an immense aristolochia, which was trained over the door and hung down in large festoons, he observed that the outer apartment, which was a spacious antechamber, was, as he had guessed, perfectly empty. This antechamber communicated with the interior of the house by means of two doors, one open, the other closed; Gilbert guessed that the open one was that belonging to Nicole's chamber. He softly entered this room, stretching out his hands before him for fear of accident, for the room was entirely without light; but, at the end of a sort of corridor was seen a glass door whose framework was clearly designed against the light of the adjoining apartment. On the inner side of this glass door was drawn a muslin curtain.

As Gilbert advanced along the corridor, he heard a feeble voice speaking in the lighted apartment; it was Andrée's, and every drop of Gilbert's blood rushed to his heart. Another voice replied to hers; it was Philip's. The young man was anxiously inquiring after his sister's health.

Gilbert, now on his guard, proceeded a few steps farther, and placed himself behind one of those truncated columns surmounted by a bust, which, at that period, formed the usual ornament of double doors. Thus concealed, he strained his eyes and ears to the utmost stretch; so happy, that his heart melted with joy; so fearful, that the same heart shrunk together till it seemed to become only a minute point in his breast.

He listened and gazed.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE BROTHER AND SISTER.

GILBERT, as we have said, gazed and listened. He saw Andrée stretched on a reclining chair, her face turned towards the glass door, that is to say, directly towards him. This door was slightly ajar.

A small lamp with a deep shade was placed upon an adjoining table—which was covered with books, indicating the only species of recreation permitted to the invalid—and lighted only the lower part of Mademoiselle de Taverney's face. Sometimes, however, when she leaned back, so as to rest against the pillow of the reclining chair, the light overspread her marble forehead, which was veiled in a lace cap. Philip was sitting at the foot of her chair with his back towards Gilbert; his arm was still in a sling, and all exercise of it was forbidden.

It was the first time that Andrée had been up, and the first time also that Philip had left his room. The young people, therefore, had not seen each other since that terrible night, but each knew that the other was recovering, and hastening towards convalescence. They had only been together for a few moments, and were conversing without restraint, for they knew that even if any one should interrupt them, they would be warned by the noise of the bell attached to the door which Nicole had left open. But of course they were not aware of the circumstance of the door having been left open, and they calculated upon the bell.

Gilbert saw and heard all, therefore; for, through this open door, he could seize every word of their conversation.

"So now," Philip was saying, just as Gilbert took his place behind a

curtain hung loosely before the door of a dressing-room, "so now you breathe more easily, my poor sister?"

"Yes, more easily; but still with a slight pain."

"And your strength?"

"Returns but slowly; nevertheless, I have been able to walk to the window two or three times to-day. How sweet the fresh air is, how lovely the flowers! It seems to me that, surrounded with air and flowers, it is impossible to die."

"But still you are very weak; are you not, Andrée?"

"Oh yes! for the shock was a terrible one! Therefore," continued the young girl, smiling and shaking her head, "I repeat that I walk with difficulty, and am obliged to lean on the tables and the projecting points of the wainscoting. Without this support my limbs bend under me, and I feel as if I should every moment fall."

"Courage, Andrée! The fresh air and the beautiful flowers you spoke of just now will cure you, and in a week you will be able to pay a visit to the dauphiness, who, I am informed, sends to inquire so kindly for you."

"Yes, I hope so, Philip; for the dauphiness in truth seems most kind to me."

And Andrée, leaning back, put her hand upon her chest and closed her lovely eyes.

Gilbert made a step forward with outstretched arms.

"You are in pain, my sister?" asked Philip, taking her hand.

"Yes, at times I have slight spasms, and sometimes the blood mounts to my head, and my temples throb; sometimes again I feel quite giddy, and my heart sinks within me."

"Oh," said Philip dreamily, "that is not surprising; you have met with a dreadful trial, and your escape was almost miraculous."

"Miraculous is in truth the proper term, brother."

"But, speaking of your miraculous escape, Andrée," said Philip, approaching closer to his sister, to give more emphasis to the question, "do you know I have never yet had an opportunity of speaking to you of this catastrophe?"

Andrée blushed and seemed uneasy, but Philip did not remark this change of colour, or at least did not appear to remark it.

"I thought, however," said the young girl, "that the person who restored me to you gave all the explanations you could wish; my father, at least, told me he was quite satisfied."

"Of course, my dear Andrée; and this man, so far as I could judge, behaved with extreme delicacy in the whole affair; but still some parts of his tale seemed to me, not suspicious indeed, but obscure—that is the proper term."

"How so, and what do you mean, brother?" asked Andrée, with the frankness of innocence.

"For instance," said Philip, "there is one point which did not at first strike me, but which has since seemed to me to bear a very strange aspect."

"Which?" asked Andrée.

"Why, the very manner in which you were saved. Can you describe it to me?"

The young girl seemed to make an effort over herself.

"Oh! Philip," said she, "I have almost forgotten—I was so much terrified."

"No matter, my sweetest Andrée; tell me all you remember."

"Well, you know, brother, we were separated about twenty paces from the Garde Meuble. I saw you dragged away towards the garden of the Tuileries, while I was drawn towards the Rue Royale. For an instant I could distinguish you making fruitless attempts to rejoin me. I stretched out my arms towards you, crying, Philip! Philip! when all at once I was, as it were, seized by a whirlwind, which raised me aloft and bore me in the direction of the railings. I felt the living tide carrying me towards the wall, where I must be dashed to atoms; I heard the cries of those who were crushed against the railings; I felt that my turn would come to be crushed and mangled; I could almost calculate the number of seconds I had yet to live, when, half dead and almost frantic, raising my hands and eyes to heaven in a last prayer, I met the burning glance of a man who seemed to govern the crowd, and whom the crowd seemed to obey."

"And this man was the Count Joseph Balsamo?"

"Yes; the same whom I had already seen at Taverney—the same who, even there, inspired me with such a strange terror; he, in short, who seems to be endowed with some supernatural power, who has fascinated my sight with his eyes, my ears with his voice; who has made my whole being tremble by the mere touch of his finger on my shoulder."

"Proceed, proceed, Andrée," said Philip, his features and voice becoming gloomier as she spoke.

"Well, this man seemed to tower aloft above the catastrophe, as if human suffering could not reach him. I read in his eyes that he wished to save me—that he had the power to do so. Then something extraordinary took place in me and around me. Bruised, powerless, half dead as I was, I felt myself raised towards this man as if some unknown, mysterious, invincible power drew me to him. I felt as if some strong arm, by a mighty effort, was lifting me out of the gulf of mangled flesh in which so many unhappy victims were suffocating, and was restoring me to air, to life. Oh, Philip!" continued Andrée, with a sort of feverish vehemence, "I feel certain it was that man's look which attracted me to him. I reached his hand; I was saved!"

"Alas!" murmured Gilbert, "she had eyes only for him; and I—I—who was dying at her feet—she saw me not!"

He wiped his brow, bathed in perspiration.

"That is how the affair happened, then!" asked Philip.

"Yes; up to the moment when I felt myself out of danger. Then, whether all my force had been exhausted in the last effort I had made, or whether the terror I had experienced had outstripped the measure of my strength, I do not know, but I fainted."

"And at what time do you think you fainted?"

"About ten minutes after we were separated, brother."

"Yes," pursued Philip, "that was about midnight. How then did it happen that you did not return till three o'clock? Forgive me this catechising, which may seem ridiculous to you, dear Andrée, but I have a good reason for it."

"Thanks, Philip," said Andrée, pressing her brother's hand. "Three days ago I could not have replied to you as I have now done; but to-day—it may seem strange to you what I am about to say—but to-day my mental vision is stronger; it seems to me as if some will stronger than my own ordered me to remember, and I do remember."

"Then tell me, dear Andrée, for I am all impatience to know, did this man carry you away in his arms?"

"In his arms?" said Andrée, blushing; "I do not well recollect. All

I know is, that he extricated me out of the crowd. But the touch of his hand caused me the same feeling as at Taverney, and scarcely had he touched me when I fainted again, or rather, I sunk to sleep ; for fainting is generally preceded by a painful feeling, and on this occasion I only felt the pleasing sensation attendant on sleep."

"In truth, Andrée, what you tell me seems so strange, that if any other related these things, I should not believe them. But proceed," continued he, in a voice which betrayed more emotion than he was willing to let appear.

As for Gilbert, he devoured Andrée's every word, for he knew that, so far at least, each word was true.

"When I regained my consciousness," continued the young girl, "I was in a splendidly furnished saloon. A femme-de-chambre and a lady were standing beside me, but they did not seem at all uneasy, for when I awoke they were smiling benevolently."

"Do you know what time this was, Andrée?"

"The half-hour after midnight was just striking."

"Oh!" said the young man, breathing freely, "that is well. Proceed, Andrée, with your narrative."

"I thanked the ladies for the attentions they lavished on me ; but knowing how uneasy you would be, I begged them to send me home immediately. Then they told me that the count had returned to the scene of the accident to assist the wounded, but that he would return with a carriage and convey me back himself to our hotel. In fact, about two o'clock I heard a carriage roll along the street ; then the same sensation which I had formerly felt on the approach of that man overpowered me ; I fell back trembling and almost senseless upon a sofa. The door opened. In the midst of my confusion I could still recognise the man who had saved me ; then for a second time I lost all consciousness. They must then have carried me down, placed me in the carriage, and brought me here. That is all I can remember, brother."

Philip calculated the time, and saw that his sister must have been brought direct from the Rue des Ecuries-du-Louvre to the Rue Coq-Heron, as she had been from the Place Louis XV. to the Rue des Ecuries-du-Louvre ; and, joyfully pressing her hand, he said in a frank, cheerful voice :

"Thanks, my dear sister, thanks ; all the calculations correspond exactly. I will call upon the Marchioness de Sévigny, and thank her in person. In the meantime, one word more upon a subject of secondary importance."

"Speak."

"Do you remember seeing among the crowd any face with which you were acquainted?"

"No ; none."

"The little Gilbert's, for example?"

"In fact," said Andrée, endeavouring to recall her thoughts, "I do remember to have seen him At the moment when we were separated, he was about ten paces from me."

"She saw me!" murmured Gilbert.

"Because, while searching for you, Andrée, I discovered the poor lad."

"Among the dead?" asked Andrée, with that peculiar shade of interest which the great testify for their dependents.

"No, he was only wounded ; he was saved, and I hope he will recover."

"Oh! I am glad to hear it," said Andrée ; "and what injury had he received?"

"His chest was greatly bruised."

"Yes, yes, against thine, Andrée!" murmured Gilbert.

"But," continued Philip, "the strangest circumstance of all, and the one which induced me to speak of the lad, was, that I found in his hand, clenched and stiffened by pain, a fragment of your dress."

"That is strange, indeed."

"Did you not see him at the last moment?"

"At the last moment, Philip, I saw so many fearful forms of terror, pain, selfishness, love, pity, avarice, and indifference, that I felt as if I had passed a year in the realms of torment, and as if these figures were those of the damned passing in review before me. I may, therefore, have seen the young man, but I do not remember him."

"And yet the piece of stuff torn from your dress?—and it was your dress, Andrée, for Nicole has examined it."

"Did you tell the girl for what purpose you questioned her?" asked Andrée; for she remembered the singular explanation she had had at Taverney with her waiting-maid on the subject of this same Gilbert.

"Oh no. However, the fragment was in his hand. How can you explain that?"

"Oh! very easily," said Andrée, with a calmness which presented a strange contrast to the fearful beating of Gilbert's heart; "if he was near me when I felt myself raised aloft, as it were, by this man's look, he has probably clung to me to profit by the help I was receiving, in the same manner as a drowning man clings to the belt of the swimmer."

"Oh!" said Gilbert, with a feeling of angry contempt at this explanation of the young girl; "oh, what an ignoble interpretation of my devotion! How these nobles judge us sons of the people! Monsieur Rousseau is right; we are worth more than they; our hearts are purer, and our arms stronger."

As he once more settled himself to listen to the conversation of the brother and sister, which he had for a moment lost during this *aside*, he heard a noise behind him.

"Oh heavens!" murmured he, "some one in the ante-room!"

And hearing the step approach the corridor, Gilbert drew back into the dressing-room, letting the curtain fall before him.

"Well! Is that madcap Nicole not here?" said the Baron de Taverney's voice, as he entered his daughter's apartment, touching Gilbert with the flaps of his coat as he passed.

"I dare say she is in the garden," said Andrée, with a tranquillity which showed that she had no suspicion of the presence of a third person; "good-evening, my dear father."

Philip rose respectfully; the baron motioned him to remain where he was, and taking an arm-chair, sat down near his children.

"Ah! my children," said the baron, "it is a long journey from the Rue Coq-Heron to Versailles, when, instead of going in a good court carriage, you have only a fiacre drawn by one horse. However, I saw the dauphiness, nevertheless."

"Ah!" said Andrée, "then you have just arrived from Versailles, my dear father?"

"Yes; the princess did me the honour to send for me, having heard of the accident which had happened to my daughter."

"Andrée is much better, father," said Philip.

"I am perfectly aware of it, and I told her royal highness so, who was kind enough to promise that, as soon as your sister is completely restored,

she will summon her to Petit-Trianon, which she has fixed upon for her residence, and which she is now having decorated according to her taste."

"I!—I at court!" said Andrée, timidly.

"It is not the court, my child. The dauphiness has quiet and unobtrusive habits, and the dauphin hates show and noise. They will live in complete retirement at Trianon. However, from what I know of her highness the dauphiness's disposition, her little family parties will turn out in the end much better than Beds of Justice and meetings of States-General. The princess has a decided character, and the dauphin, I am told, is learned."

"Oh, it will always be the court! Do not deceive yourself, sister," said Philip, mournfully.

"The court!" said Gilbert to himself, with an emotion of concentrated rage and despair. "The court! that is a summit which I cannot reach, or a gulf into which I cannot dash myself. In that case, farewell, Andrée! Lost!—lost to me for ever!"

"But, my father," replied Andrée, "we have neither the fortune which would warrant our choosing such a residence, nor the education necessary for those who move in its lofty circle. What shall I, a poor girl, do among those brilliant ladies, whose dazzling splendour I on one occasion witnessed, whose minds I thought so empty, but at the same time so sparkling? Alas! my brother, we are too obscure to mingle among so many dazzling lights."

The baron knit his brow.

"Still the same absurd ideas!" said he. "In truth, I cannot understand the pains which my family take to depreciate everything which they inherit from me, or which relates to me. Obscure! Really, mademoiselle, you are mad. Obscure!—a Taverney-Maison-Rouge obscure! And who will shine, pray, if you do not! Fortune?—pardieu! we know what the fortunes of the court are? The sun of royalty fills them, the same sun makes them blow—it is the great vivifier of court nature. I have ruined myself at court, and now I shall grow rich again at court, that's all. Has the king no more money to bestow upon his faithful servants? And do you really think I would blush at a regiment being offered to my eldest son, at a dowry being granted to you, Andrée, at a nice little appanage conferred on myself, or at finding a handsome pension under my napkin some day at dinner? No, no, fools alone have prejudices; I have none. Besides, it is only my own property which is given back to me. Do not, therefore, entertain these foolish scruples. There remains only one of your objections—your education, of which you spoke just now. But, mademoiselle, remember, that no young lady of the court has been educated as you have been. Nay, more; you have, besides the education usually given to the daughters of the noblesse, the solid acquirements more generally confined to the families of lawyers or financiers. You are a musician, and you draw landscapes, with sheep and cows, which Berghem need not disclaim. Now, the dauphiness absolutely doats on cows, on sheep, and on Berghem. You are beautiful; the king cannot fail to notice it. You can converse; that will charm the Count d'Artois and the Count de Provence: you will not only be well received, therefore, but adored. Yes, yes," continued the baron, rubbing his hands, and chuckling in so strange a manner that Philip gazed at his father to see if the laugh was really produced by a human mouth, "adored! I have said the word."

Andrée cast down her eyes, and Philip, taking her hand, said:

"Our father is right, Andrée, you are everything he described. None can be more worthy to enter Versailles than you."

"But I shall be separated from you," replied Andrée.

"By no means, by no means," interrupted the baron; "Versailles is large, my dear."

"Yes, but Trianon is little," replied Andrée, haughty and rather unmanageable when she was opposed.

"Trianon will always be large enough to provide a chamber for M. de Taverney. A man such as I am always finds room," added he, with a modesty which meant—always knows how to make room for himself.

Andrée, not much comforted by this promised proximity of her father, turned to Philip.

"My sister," said the latter, "you will certainly not belong to what is called the court. Instead of placing you in a convent and paying your dowry, the dauphiness, who wishes to distinguish you, will keep you near herself in some employment. Etiquette is not so rigid now as in the time of Louis XIV. Offices are more easily fused together and separated. You can occupy the post of reader or companion to the dauphiness; she will draw with you, she will always keep you near her; probably you will never appear in public, but you will enjoy her immediate protection, and consequently, will inspire envy. That is what you fear, is it not?"

"Yes, my brother."

"However," said the baron, "we shall not grieve for such a trifle as one or two envious persons. Get better quickly, therefore, Andrée, and I shall have the pleasure of taking you to Trianon myself: it is the dauphiness's commands."

"Very well, father, I shall go."

"Apropos, Philip, have you any money?" asked the baron.

"If you want some, sir," replied the young man, "I have not enough to offer you; if you wish to give me some, I shall answer you, on the contrary, that I have enough for myself."

"True, you are a philosopher," said the baron, laughing sarcastically. "Are you a philosopher, also, Andrée, who have nothing to ask from me, or is there anything you wish for?"

"I am afraid of embarrassing you, father."

"Oh! we are not at Taverney now. The king has sent me five hundred louis-d'ors; on account, his majesty said. Think of your wardrobe, Andrée."

"Thank you, my dear father," said the young girl, joyously.

"There, there," said the baron, "see the extremes—only a minute ago she wanted nothing, now she would ruin the Emperor of China. But no matter, ask—fine dresses will become you well, Andrée."

Then, giving her a very affectionate kiss, the baron opened the door of an apartment which separated his own from his daughter's chamber, and left the room, saying:

"That cursed Nicole is not here to show me light."

"Shall I ring for her, father?"

"No, I have La Brie, who is sleeping in some arm-chair or other; good-night, my children."

Philip now rose in his turn.

"Good-night, brother," said Andrée. "I am dreadfully tired. It is the first time I have spoken so much since my accident. Good-night, dear Philip."

And she gave her hand to the young man, who kissed it with brotherly

affection, but at the same time with a sort of respect with which his sister always inspired him, and retired, touching, as he passed, the door behind which Gilbert was concealed.

"Shall I call Nicole?" asked he, as he left the room.

"No, no," said Andrée, "I can undress alone; adieu, Philip."

CHAPTER LXXII.

WHAT GILBERT HAD FORESEEN.

WHEN Andrée was alone she rose from the chair, and a shudder passed through Gilbert's frame.

The young girl stood upright, and with her hands, white as alabaster, she took the hair-pins one by one from her head-dress, while the light shawl in which she was wrapped slipped from her shoulders, and showed her snowy graceful neck, and her arms, which, raised carelessly above her head, displayed to advantage the muscles of her exquisite throat and bosom, palpitating under the cambric.

Gilbert, on his knees, breathless, intoxicated, felt the blood rush furiously to his heart and forehead. Fiery waves circulated in his veins, a cloud of flame descended over his sight, and strange feverish noises boiled in his ears. His state of mind bordered on madness. He was on the point of crossing the threshold of Andrée's door, and crying:

"Yes, thou art beautiful, thou art indeed beautiful! But be not so proud of thy beauty, for thou owest it to me—I saved thy life!"

All at once, a knot in her waist-band embarrassed the young girl; she became impatient, stamped with her foot, and sat down weak and trembling on her bed, as if this slight obstacle had overcome her strength. Then, bending towards the cord of the bell, she pulled it impatiently.

This noise recalled Gilbert to his senses. Nicole had left the door open to hear, therefore she would come.

"Farewell, my dream!" murmured he. "Farewell, happiness! henceforth only a baseless vision—henceforth only a remembrance, ever burning in my imagination, ever present to my heart!"

Gilbert endeavoured to rush from the pavilion, but the baron on entering had closed the doors of the corridor after him. Not calculating on this interruption, he was some moments before he could open them.

Just as he entered Nicole's apartment, Nicole reached the pavilion. The young man heard the gravel of the garden walk grinding under her steps. He had only time to conceal himself in the shade, in order to let the young girl pass him; for after crossing the antechamber, the door of which she locked, she flew along the corridor as light as a bird.

Gilbert gained the antechamber and attempted to escape into the garden, but Nicole, whilst running on and crying: "I am coming, mademoiselle! I am coming! I am just closing the door!" had closed it indeed, and not only closed it and double-locked it, but in her confusion had put the key into her pocket.

Gilbert tried in vain to open the door. Then he had recourse to the windows, but they were barred, and after five minutes' investigation, he saw that it was impossible to escape.

The young man crouched into a corner, fortifying himself with the firm resolve to make Nicole open the door for him.

As for the latter, when she had given the plausible excuse for her absence, that she had gone to close the windows of the greenhouse, lest the night air might injure her young lady's flowers, she finished undressing Andrée, and assisted her to bed.

There was a tremulousness in Nicole's voice, an unsteadiness in her hands, and an eagerness in all her attentions, which were very unusual, and indicated some extraordinary emotion. But from the calm and lofty sphere in which Andrée's thoughts revolved, she rarely looked down upon the lower earth, and when she did so, the inferior beings whom she saw seemed like atoms in her eyes. She therefore perceived nothing. Meanwhile Gilbert was boiling with impatience, since he found the retreat thus cut off. He now longed only for liberty.

Andrée dismissed Nicole after a short chat, in which the latter exhibited all the wheedling manner of a remorseful waiting-maid.

Before retiring, she turned back her mistress's coverlet, lowered the lamp, sweetened the warm drink which was standing in a silver goblet upon an alabaster night lamp, wished her mistress good-night in her sweetest voice, and left the room on tip-toe. As she came out she closed the glass door. Then, humming gaily, as if her mind was perfectly tranquil, she crossed the antechamber and advanced towards the door leading into the garden.

Gilbert guessed Nicole's intention, and for a moment he asked himself if he should not, in place of making himself known, slip out suddenly, taking advantage of the opportunity to escape when the door should be opened. But in that case he would be seen without being recognised, and he would be taken for a robber. Nicole would cry for help, he would not have time to reach the cord, and even if he should reach it, he would be seen in his aerial flight, his retreat discovered, and himself made the object of the Taverneys' displeasure, which could not fail to be deep and lasting, considering the feeling evinced towards him by the head of the family.

True, he might expose Nicole, and procure her dismissal; but of what use would that be to him? He would in that case have done evil without reaping any corresponding advantage, in short, from pure revenge; and Gilbert was not so feeble-minded as to feel satisfied when he was revenged. Useless revenge was to him worse than a bad action, it was folly.

As Nicole approached the door where Gilbert was in waiting, he suddenly emerged from the shadow in which he was concealed, and appeared to the young girl in the full rays of the moonlight which was streaming through the window. Nicole was on the point of crying out, but she took Gilbert for another, and said, after the first emotion of terror was past:

"You here! What imprudence!"

"Yes, it is I," replied Gilbert, in a whisper; "but do not cry out for me more than you would do for another."

This time Nicole recognised her interlocutor.

"Gilbert!" she exclaimed, "oh, heaven!"

"I requested you not to cry out," said the young man, coldly.

"But what are you doing here, sir?" exclaimed Nicole, angrily.

"Come," said Gilbert, as coolly as before, "a moment ago you called me imprudent, and now you are more imprudent than I."

"I think I am only too kind to you in asking what you are doing here," said Nicole; "for I know very well."

"What am I doing then?"

"You came to see Mademoiselle Andrée."

"Mademoiselle Andrée?" said Gilbert, as calmly as before.

"Yes, you are in love with her; but, fortunately, she does not love you."

"Indeed?"

"But take care, Monsieur Gilbert," said Nicole, threateningly.

"Oh, I must take care?"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

"Take care that I do not inform on you."

"You, Nicole?"

"Yes, I; take care I don't get you dismissed from the house."

"Try," said Gilbert, smiling.

"You defy me."

"Yes, absolutely defy you."

"What will happen, then, if I tell mademoiselle, Monsieur Philip, and the baron, that I met you here?"

"It will happen as you have said—not that I shall be dismissed—I am, thank God, dismissed already—but that I shall be tracked and hunted like a wild beast. But she who will be dismissed will be Nicole."

"How Nicole?"

"Certainly; Nicole, who has stones thrown to her over the walls."

"Take care, Monsieur Gilbert," said Nicole, in a threatening tone, "a piece of mademoiselle's dress was found in your hand upon the Place Louis XV."

"You think so?"

"Monsieur Philip told his father so. He suspects nothing as yet, but if he gets a hint or two, perhaps he will suspect in the end."

"And who will give him the hint?"

"I shall."

"Take care, Nicole! One might suspect, also, that when you seem to be drying lace, you are picking up the stones that are thrown over the wall!"

"It is false!" cried Nicole. Then, retracting her denial, she continued: "At all events, it is not a crime to receive a letter—not like stealing in here while mademoiselle is undressing. Ah! what will you say to that, Monsieur Gilbert?"

"I shall say, Mademoiselle Nicole, that it is also a crime for such a well-conducted young lady as you are to slip keys under the doors of gardens."

Nicole trembled.

"I shall say," continued Gilbert, "that if I, who am known to M. de Taverney, to Monsieur Philip, to Mademoiselle Andrée, have committed a crime in entering here, in my anxiety to know how the family I so long served were, and particularly Mademoiselle Andrée, whom I endeavoured so strenuously to save on the evening of the fireworks, that a piece of her dress remained in my hand—I shall say, that if I have committed this pardonable crime, you have committed the unpardonable one of introducing a stranger into your master's house, and are now going to meet him a second time, in the greenhouse, where you have already spent an hour in his company——"

"Gilbert! Gilbert!"

"Oh! how virtuous we are, all of a sudden, Mademoiselle Nicole! You deem it very wicked that I should be found here, whilst——"

"Gilbert!"

"Yes, go and tell mademoiselle that I love her. I shall say that it is

you whom I love, and she will believe me, for you were foolish enough to tell her so at Taverney."

"Gilbert, my friend!"

"And you will be dismissed, Nicole; and in place of going to Trianon, and entering the household of the dauphiness with mademoiselle—instead of coquetting with the fine lords and rich gentlemen, as you will not fail to do if you remain with the family—instead of all this, you will be sent to enjoy the society of your admirer, M. Beausire, an exempt, a soldier! Oh! what a direful fall! What a noble ambition Mademoiselle Nicole's is—to be the favoured fair one of a guardsman!"

And Gilbert began to hum, in a low voice, with a most malicious accent:

"In the Garde Française
I had a faithful lover."

"In mercy, Monsieur Gilbert," said Nicole, "do not look at me in that ill-natured manner. Your eyes pierce me, even in the darkness. Do not laugh either—your laugh terrifies me."

"Then open the door," said Gilbert, imperatively; "open the door for me, Nicole, and not another word of all this."

Nicole opened the door with so violent a nervous trembling, that her shoulders and head shook like those of an old woman.

Gilbert tranquilly stepped out first, and seeing that the young girl was leading him towards the door of the garden, he said:

"No, no; you have your means for admitting people here, I have my means for leaving it. Go to the greenhouse, to M. Beausire, who must be waiting impatiently for you, and remain with him ten minutes longer than you intended to do. I will grant you this recompense for your discretion."

"Ten minutes, and why ten minutes?" asked Nicole, trembling.

"Because I require ten minutes to disappear. Go, Nicole, go; and, like Lot's wife, whose story I told you at Taverney, when you gave me a rendezvous among the hay-stacks, do not turn round, else something worse will happen to you than to be changed into a statue of salt. Go, beautiful siren, go; I have nothing else to say to you."

Nicole, subdued, alarmed, conquered, by the coolness and presence of mind shown by Gilbert, who held her future destiny in his hands, turned with drooping head towards the greenhouse, where Beausire was already uneasy at her prolonged absence.

Gilbert, on his side, observing the same precautions as before to avoid discovery, once more reached the wall, seized his rope, and, assisted by the vine and trellis-work, gained the first story in safety, and quickly ascended the stairs. As luck would have it, he met no one on his way up; the neighbours were already to bed, and Therese was still at supper.

Gilbert was too much excited by his victory over Nicole to entertain the least fear of missing his foot in the leaden gutter. He felt as if he could have walked on the edge of a sharpened razor, had the razor been a league long. He regained his attic in safety therefore, closed the window, seized the note, which no one had touched, and tore it in pieces. Then he stretched himself with a delicious feeling of langour upon his bed.

Half-an-hour afterwards Therese kept her word, and came to the door to inquire how he was. Gilbert thanked her, in a voice interrupted by terrific yawns, as if he were dying of sleep. He was eager to be alone, quite alone, in darkness and silence, to collect his thoughts, and analyse the varied emotions of this ever-memorable day.

Soon, indeed, everything faded from his mind's eye; the baron, Philip,

Nicole, Beausire, disappeared from view, to give place to the vision of Andrée at her toilet, her arms raised above her head, and detaching the pins from her long and flowing hair.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE BOTANISTS.

THE events which we have just related happened on Friday evening ; so that it was the second day after, that the excursion which Rousseau looked forward to with so much pleasure was to take place.

Gilbert, indifferent to everything since he had heard that Andrée was so soon to depart for Trianon, had spent the entire day leaning on his window-sill. During this day the window of Andrée's room remained open, and once or twice the young girl had approached it as if to breathe the fresh air. She was pale and weak; but it seemed to Gilbert as if he would wish for nothing more than that Andrée should always inhabit that pavilion, that he should always have his attic, and that, once or twice every day, Andrée should come to the window as he had seen her that day.

The long looked-for Sunday at last arrived. Rousseau had already made his preparations the day before : his shoes were carefully blackened, and his grey coat, at once light and warm, was taken from the chest, to the great annoyance of Therese, who thought a blouse or a linen frock quite good enough for such a purpose. But Rousseau had completed his toilet without replying. Not only his own clothes, but Gilbert's also, had been passed in review with the greatest care, and the latter's had even been augmented by a pair of irreproachable stockings and new shoes, which Rousseau had presented him with as an agreeable surprise.

The herbal also was put in the nicest trim. Rousseau had not forgotten his collection of mosses, which was to play a part in the proceedings of the day. Impatient as a child, he hastened more than twenty times to the window to see if the carriage that was passing was not M. de Jussieu's. At last he perceived a highly-varnished chariot, a pair of splendid horses with rich harness, and an immense powdered footman standing at his door. He ran instantly to Therese, exclaiming :

" Here it is ! here it is !"

And crying to Gilbert :

" Quick, quick, the carriage is waiting."

" Well," said Therese, sharply, " if you are so fond of riding in a coach, why did you not work in order to have one of your own, like M. de Voltaire?"

" Be quiet !" grumbled Rousseau.

" *Dame !* you always say you have as much talent as he."

" I do not say so, hark you !" cried Rousseau, in a rage ; " I say—I say nothing !"

And all his joy fled, as it invariably did, at the mention of that hated name. Luckily M. de Jussieu entered.

He was pomatumed, powdered, fresh as the spring. His dress consisted of a splendid coat of ribbed Indian satin, of a light grey colour, a vest of pale lilac silk, white silk stockings of extraordinary fineness, and bright gold buckles.

On entering Rousseau's apartment he filled the room with a delightful perfume, which Therese inhaled without concealing her admiration.

"How handsome you are!" said Rousseau, looking askance at Therese, and comparing his modest dress and clumsy equipment with the elegant toilet of M. de Jussieu.

"Oh, I am afraid of the heat," said the elegant botanist.

"But the wood is damp. If we botanise in the marshes, your silken stockings——"

"Oh, we can choose the driest places."

"And the aquatic mosses? Must we give them up for to-day?"

"Do not be uneasy about that, my dear colleague."

"One would think you were going to a ball, or to pay your respects to ladies."

"Why should we not honour Dame Nature with a pair of silk stockings?" replied M. de Jussieu, rather embarrassed: "does she not deserve that we should dress ourselves for her?"

Rousseau said no more; from the moment that M. de Jussieu invoked Nature, he agreed with him that it was impossible to honour her too highly.

As for Gilbert, notwithstanding his stoicism, he gazed at M. de Jussieu with envious eyes. Since he had observed so many young exquisites enhance their natural advantages with dress, he had seen the utility, in a frivolous point of view, of elegance, and whispered to himself that this silk, this lace, this linen, would add a charm to his youth; and that if Andrée saw him dressed like M. de Jussieu instead of as he was, she would then deign to look at him.

The carriage rolled off at the utmost speed of two fine Danish horses, and an hour after their departure the botanists alighted at Bougival, and turned to the left by the chestnut walk.

This walk, which at present is so surpassingly beautiful, was then at least quite as much so; for the portion of the rising ground which our explorers had to traverse, already planted by Louis XIV., had been the object of constant care since the king had taken a fancy to Marly.

The chestnut-trees, with their ruddy bark, their gigantic branches, and their fantastic forms—sometimes presenting in their knotty circumvolutions the appearance of a huge boa twining itself round the trunk—sometimes that of a bull prostrate upon the butcher's block and vomiting a stream of black and clotted blood—the moss-covered apple-trees and the colossal walnuts, whose foliage was already assuming the dark-blue shade of summer—the solitude, the picturesque simplicity and grandeur of the landscape, which, with its old shadowy trees, stood out in bold relief against the clear blue sky;—all this, clothed with that simple and touching charm which nature ever lends to her productions, plunged Rousseau into a state of ecstacy impossible to be described.

Gilbert was calm, but moody; his whole being was absorbed in this one thought:

"Andrée leaves the garden pavilion and goes to Trianon."

Upon the summit of the little hill, which the three botanists were climbing on foot, was seen the square tower of Luciennes.

The sight of this building, from which he had fled, changed the current of Gilbert's thoughts, and recalled rather unpleasant recollections, unmingled, however, with fear. From his position in the rear of the party he saw two protectors before him; and, feeling himself in safety, he gazed at Luciennes as a shipwrecked sailor from the shore looks upon the sand-bank upon which his vessel has struck.

Rousseau, spade in hand, began to fix his looks on the ground; M. de Jussieu did the same, but with this difference, that the former was search-

ing for plants, while the latter was only endeavouring to keep his stockings from the damp.

"What a splendid *Lepopodium!*" exclaimed Rousseau.

"Charming," replied M. de Jussieu; "but let us pass on, if you have no objection."

"Ah! the *Lysimachia Fenella!* it is ready for culling; look!"

"Pluck it, then, if it gives you pleasure."

"Oh! just as you please. But are we not botanising, then?"

"Yes, yes; but I think we shall find better upon that height, yonder."

"As you please—let us go, then."

"What hour is it?" asked M. de Jussieu; "in my hurry I forgot my watch."

Rousseau pulled a very large silver watch from his pocket.

"Nine o'clock," said he.

"Have you any objection that we should rest a little?" continued M. de Jussieu.

"Oh! what a wretched walker you are," said Rousseau. "You see what it is to botanise in fine shoes and silk stockings."

"Perhaps I am hungry."

"Well, then, let us breakfast; the village is about a quarter of a league from this."

"Oh, no; we need not go so far."

"How so? Have you our breakfast in your carriage?"

"Look yonder—into that thicket?" said M. de Jussieu, pointing with his hand towards the part of the horizon he indicated.

Rousseau stood upon tiptoe, and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"I can see nothing," said he.

"What! Do you not see that little rustic roof?"

"No."

"Surmounted by a weather-cock, and the walls thatched with red and white straw—a sort of rustic cottage, in short?"

"Yes, I see it now; a little building seemingly newly erected."

"A *kiosk*, that is it."

"Well?"

"Well! we shall find there the little luncheon I promised you."

"Very good," said Rousseau. "Are you hungry, Gilbert?"

Gilbert, who had not paid any attention to this debate, and was employed in mechanically knocking off the heads of the wild flowers, replied:

"Whatever you please, sir."

"Come, then, if you please," said M. de Jussieu; "besides, nothing need prevent our gathering simples on the way."

"Oh," said Rousseau, "your nephew is a more ardent botanist than you. I spent a day with him botanising in the woods of Montmorency, along with a select party. He finds well, he gathers well, he explains well."

"Oh! he is young; he has his name to make yet."

"Has he not yours already made? Oh! comrade, comrade, you botanise like an amateur."

"Come, do not be angry, my dear philosopher; hold! here is the beautiful *Plantago Monanthos*. Did you find anything like that at your Montmorency?"

"No, indeed," said Rousseau, quite delighted; "I have often searched for it in vain. Upon the faith of a naturalist it is magnificent!"

"Oh, the beautiful pavilion!" said Gilbert, who had passed from the rear-guard of the party into the van.

"Gilbert is hungry," replied M. de Jussieu.

"Oh, sir, I beg your pardon; I can wait patiently until you are ready."

"Let us continue our task a little longer," said Rousseau, "inasmuch as botanising after a meal is bad for digestion; and besides, the eye is then heavy, and the back stiff. But what is this pavilion called?"

"*The mouse-trap*," answered M. de Jussieu, remembering the name invented by M. de Sartines.

"What a singular name!"

"Oh! the country, you know, is the place for indulging all sorts of caprices."

"To whom do those beautiful grounds belong?"

"I do not exactly know."

"You must know the proprietor, however, since you are going to breakfast there," said Rousseau, pricking up his ears with a slight shade of suspicion.

"Not at all—or rather, I know every one here, including the gamekeepers, who have often seen me in their inclosures, and who always touch their hats, and sometimes offer me a hare or a string of woodcocks as a present from their masters. The people on this and the neighbouring estates let me do here just as if I were on my own grounds. I do not know exactly whether this summer-house belongs to Madame de Mirepoix or Madame d'Egmont, or—in short, I do not know to whom it belongs. But the most important point, my dear philosopher, I am sure you will agree with me, is, that we shall find there bread, fruit, and pastry."

The good-natured tone in which M. de Jussieu spoke dispelled the cloud of suspicion which had already begun to darken Rousseau's brow. The philosopher wiped his feet on the grass, rubbed the mould off his hands, and, preceded by M. de Jussieu, entered the mossy walk which wound gracefully beneath the chestnut-trees leading up to the hermitage.

Gilbert, who had again taken up his position in the rear, closed the march, dreaming of Andrée, and of the means of seeing her when she should be at Trianon.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE PHILOSOPHERS IN THE TRAP.

ON the summit of the hill, which the three botanists were ascending with some difficulty, stood one of those little rustic retreats, with gnarled and knotty pillars, pointed gables, and windows festooned with ivy and clematis, which are the genuine offspring of English architecture, or to speak more correctly, of English gardening, which imitates Nature, or rather invents a species of nature for itself, thus giving a certain air of originality to its creations.

This summer-house, which was large enough to contain a table and six chairs, was floored with tiles and carpeted with handsome matting. The walls were covered with little mosaics of flint, the product of the river's beach, mingled with foreign shells of the most delicate tints, gathered from the shores of the Indian Ocean.

The ceiling was in relief, and was composed of fir-cones and knotty

excrescences of bark, arranged so as to imitate hideous profiles of fauns or savage animals, who seemed suspended over the heads of the visitors. The windows were each stained with some different shade, so that, according as the spectator looked out of the violet, the red, or the blue glass, the woods of Vesinet seemed tinted by a stormy sky, bathed in the burning rays of an August sun, or sleeping beneath the cold and frosty atmosphere of December. The visitor had only to consult his taste, that is to say, choose his window, and look out.

This sight pleased Gilbert greatly, and he amused himself with looking through the different tinted windows at the rich valley which lies stretched beneath the feet of a spectator situated on the hill of Luciennes, and at the noble Seine winding in the midst.

A sight nearly as interesting however, at least in M. de Jussieu's opinion, was the tempting breakfast spread in the centre of the summer-house, upon a table formed of gnarled and fantastic woodwork, on which the bark had been allowed to remain.

There was the exquisite cream for which Marly is celebrated, the luscious apricots and plums of Luciennes, the crisp sausages of Nanterre smoking upon a porcelain dish, without the least trace being seen of any one who could have brought them thither; strawberries peeping from a graceful little basket lined with vine leaves, and, besides the fresh and glistening pats of butter, were rolls of homely peasant bread, with its rich brown crust, so dear to the pampered appetite of the inhabitant of towns. This sight drew an exclamation of admiration from Rousseau, who, philosopher as he was, was not the less an unaffected gourmand, for his appetite was as keen as his taste was simple.

"What folly!" said he to M. de Jussieu; "bread and fruit would have been sufficient, and even then, as true botanists and industrious explorers, we ought to have eaten the bread and munched the plums without ceasing our search among the grass or along the hedge-rows. Do you remember, Gilbert, our luncheon at Plessis-Piquet?"

"Yes, sir; the bread and cherries which appeared to me so delicious?"

"Yes, that is how true lovers of nature should breakfast."

"But, my dear master," interrupted M. de Jussieu, "if you reproach me with extravagance, you are wrong; a more modest meal was never——"

"Oh!" cried the philosopher, "you do your table injustice, my Lord Lucullus."

"*My* table?—by no means," said Jussieu.

"Who are our hosts then?" resumed Rousseau, with a smile which evinced at once good humour and constraint, "Sprites?"

"Or fairies!" said M. de Jussieu, rising and glancing stealthily towards the door.

"Fairies?" exclaimed Rousseau, gaily; "a thousand blessings on them for their hospitality! I am excessively hungry. Come, Gilbert, fall to."

And he cut a very respectable slice from the brown loaf, passing the bread and the knife to his disciple. Then, while taking a huge bite, he chose out some plums from the dish.

Gilbert hesitated.

"Come, come!" said Rousseau. "The fairies will be offended by your stiffness, and will imagine you are dissatisfied with their banquet."

"Or that it is unworthy of you, gentlemen," uttered a silvery voice from the door of the pavilion, where two young and lovely women appeared arm in arm, smiling, and making signs to M de Jussieu to moderate his obeisances.

Rousseau turned, holding the half-tasted bread in his right hand and the remains of a plum in his left, and beholding these two goddesses, at least such they seemed to him by their youth and beauty, he remained stupefied with astonishment, bowing mechanically, and retreating toward the wall of the summer-house.

"Oh, countess!" said M. de Jussieu, "you here? What a delightful surprise!"

"Good day, my dear botanist," said one of the ladies, with a grace and familiarity perfectly regal.

"Allow me to present M. Rousseau to you," said Jussieu, taking the philosopher by the hand which held the brown bread.

Gilbert also had seen and recognised the ladies. He opened his eyes to their utmost width, and, pale as death, looked out of the window of the summer-house, with the idea of throwing himself from it.

"Good day, my little philosopher," said the other lady to the almost lifeless Gilbert, patting his cheek with her rosy fingers.

Rousseau saw and heard—he was almost choking with rage. His disciple knew these goddesses, and was known to them. Gilbert was almost fainting.

"Do you not know her ladyship, the countess, M. Rousseau?" asked Jussieu.

"No," replied he, thunderstruck; "it is the first time, I think——"

"Madame Dubarry," continued M. de Jussieu.

Rousseau started up, as if he stood on a red-hot ploughshare.

"Madame Dubarry!" he exclaimed.

"The same, sir," said the young lady, with surpassing grace, "who is most happy to have received in her house, and to have been favoured with a nearer view of, the most illustrious thinker of the age."

"Madame Dubarry!" continued Rousseau, without remarking that his astonishment was becoming a grave offence against good breeding. "She! and doubtless this pavilion is hers, and doubtless it is she who has provided this breakfast."

"You have guessed rightly, my dear philosopher; she and her sister," continued Jussieu, ill at ease in presence of this threatening storm.

"Her sister, who knows Gilbert!"

"Intimately," replied Chon, with that saucy boldness which respected neither royal whims nor philosophers' fancies.

Gilbert looked as if he wished the earth would open and swallow him, so fiercely did Rousseau's eye rest upon him.

"Intimately!" repeated Rousseau; "Gilbert knew madame intimately, and I was not told of it? But in that case I was betrayed, I was sported with."

Chon and her sister looked at each other with a malicious smile.

M. de Jussieu in his agitation tore a Malines ruffle worth forty louis-d'ors.

Gilbert clasped his hands as if to entreat Chon to be silent, or Monsieur Rousseau to speak more graciously to him. But, on the contrary, it was Rousseau who was silent, and Chon who spoke.

"Yes," said she, "Gilbert and I are old friends; he was a guest of mine. Were you not, little one?—What! are you already ungrateful for the sweetmeats of Luciennes and Versailles?"

This was the final blow; Rousseau's arms fell stiff and motionless.

"Oh!" said he, looking askance at the young man, "that was the way, was it, you little scoundrel?"

"Monsieur Rousseau!" murmured Gilbert.

"Why, one would think you were weeping for the little tap I gave your cheek," continued Chon. "Well, I always feared you were ungrateful."

"Mademoiselle!" intreated Gilbert.

"Little one," said Madame Dubarry, "return to Luciennes; your bonbons and Zamore await you, and though you left it in rather a strange manner, you shall be well received."

"Thank you, madame," said Gilbert, drily; "when I leave a place, it is because I do not like it."

"And why refuse the favour that is offered to you?" interrupted Rousseau, bitterly. "You have tasted of wealth, my dear Monsieur Gilbert, and you had better return to it."

"But, sir, when I swear to you——"

"Go!—go! I do not like those who blow hot and cold with the same breath."

"But you will not listen to me, Monsieur Rousseau."

"Well?"

"I ran away from Luciennes, where I was kept locked up."

"A trap!—I know the malice of men."

"But, since I preferred you to them, since I accepted you as my host, my protector, my master——"

"Hypocrisy!"

"But, Monsieur Rousseau, if I wished for riches, I should accept the offer these ladies have made me."

"Monsieur Gilbert, I have been often deceived, but never twice by the same person; you are free, go where you please."

"But where? Good heavens!" cried Gilbert, plunged in an abyss of despair, for he saw his window, and the neighbourhood of Andrée, and his love, lost to him for ever—for his pride was hurt at being suspected of treachery; and the idea that his self-denial, his long and arduous struggle against the indolence and the passions natural to his age, was misconstrued and despised, stung him to the quick.

"Where?" said Rousseau. "Why, in the first place to this lady, of course; where could you meet a lovelier or more worthy protector?"

"Oh! my God!—my God!" cried Gilbert, burying his head in his hands.

"Do not be afraid," said M. de Jussieu, deeply wounded, as a man of the world, by Rousseau's strange sally against the ladies; "you will be taken care of, and whatever you may lose in one way, you will be amply compensated for."

"You see," said Rousseau, bitterly, "there is M. de Jussieu, a learned man, a lover of nature. one of your accomplices," added he, with a grin which was meant for a smile, "who promises you assistance and fortune, and you may be sure that what M. de Jussieu promises he can perform."

As he spoke, Rousseau, no longer master of himself, bowed to the ladies with a most majestic air, did the same to M. de Jussieu, and then, without even looking at Gilbert, he calmly left the pavilion.

"Oh! what an ugly animal a philosopher is!" said Chon, coolly, looking after the Genevese, who walked, or rather stumbled, down the path.

"Ask what you wish," said M. de Jussieu to Gilbert, who still kept his face buried in his hands.

"Yes, ask, Monsieur Gilbert," added the countess, smiling on the abandoned disciple.

The latter raised his pale face, pushed back the hair which perspiration and tears had matted over his forehead, and said with a firm voice:

"Since you are kind enough to offer me an employment, I would wish to be assistant-gardener at Trianon."

Chon and the countess looked at each other, and the former, with her tiny little foot, touched her sister's with a triumphant glance. The countess made a sign with her head that she understood perfectly.

"Is that practicable, M. de Jussieu?" asked the countess; "I should wish it very much."

"If you wish it, madame," replied he, "it is done."

Gilbert bowed, and put his hand upon his heart, which now bounded with joy as a few moments before it had been overwhelmed with grief.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE APOLOGUE.

IN that little cabinet at Luciennes, where we have seen the Count Jean Dubarry imbibe so much chocolate, to the great annoyance of the countess, the Marshal de Richelieu was lunching with Madame Dubarry, who, while amusing herself with pulling Zamore's ears, carelessly reclined at full length upon a couch of brocaded satin, whilst the old courtier uttered sighs of admiration at each new position the charming creature assumed.

"Oh, countess!" said he, smirking like an old woman, "your hair is falling down; look, there is a ringlet drooping on your neck. Ah! your slipper is falling off, countess."

"Bah! my dear duke, never mind," said she, absently, and pulling a handful of hair from Zamore's head while she took a fresh position on the couch, more lovely and fascinating than that of Venus in her shell.

Zamore, entirely insensible to these graceful attitudes, bellowed with anger. The countess endeavoured to quiet him by taking a handful of sugar-plums from the table, and filling his pockets with them. But Zamore was sulky, turned his pocket inside out, and emptied his sugar-plums upon the carpet.

"Oh, the little scoundrel!" continued the countess, stretching out her tiny foot till it came in contact with the fantastic hose of the little negro.

"Oh, have mercy!" cried the old marshal; "upon my faith, you will kill him."

"Why cannot I kill everything which angers me to-day!" said the countess; "I feel merciless!"

"Oh!" said the duke, "then perhaps I displease you."

"Oh, no! quite the contrary; you are an old friend, and I perfectly adore you; but the fact is, I believe I am going mad."

"Can it be that those whom you have made mad have smitten you with their complaint?"

"Take care! you provoke me dreadfully with your gallant speeches, of which you do not believe one word."

"Countess, countess! I begin to think you are not mad, but ungrateful."

"No, I am neither mad nor ungrateful; I am——"

"Well! confess. What are you?"

"I am angry, duke."

"Indeed?"

"Are you surprised at that?"

"Not in the least, countess; and upon my honour you have reason to be so."

"Ah! that is what annoys me in you, marshal."

"Then there is something in my conduct which annoys you, countess?"

"Yes."

"And what is this something, pray? I am rather old to begin to correct my faults, and yet there is no effort I would not make for you."

"Well, it is that you do not even know what is the cause of my anger, marshal."

"Oh, is that all?"

"Then you know what vexes me?"

"Of course! Zamore has broken the Chinese fountain."

An imperceptible smile played around the young countess's mouth; but Zamore, who felt himself guilty, drooped his head humbly, as if the skies were pregnant with clouds of blows and kicks.

"Oh, yes!" said the countess, with a sigh; "yes, duke, you are right; that is it, and in truth you are a very deep politician."

"I have always been told so," replied M. de Richelieu, with an air of profound modesty.

"Oh, I can see that without being told, duke. Have you not guessed the cause of my annoyance immediately, without looking to the right or left? It is superb."

"Superb, indeed; but still that is not all."

"Indeed!"

"No, I can guess something else."

"And what can you guess?"

"That you expected his majesty yesterday evening."

"Where?"

"Here."

"Well! what then?"

"And that his majesty did not come."

The countess reddened, and raised herself slightly upon her elbow.

"Oh!" said she.

"And yet," said the duke, "I have just arrived from Paris."

"Well, what does that prove?"

"*Pardieu!* that I could not of course know what passed at Versailles; and yet——"

"My dear duke, you are full of mystery to-day. When a person begins, he should finish, or else not have commenced."

"You speak quite at your ease, countess. Allow me, at least, to take breath. Where was I?"

"You were at—'and yet.'"

"Oh yes! true: and yet I not only know that his majesty did not come, but also why he did not come."

"Duke, I have always thought you a sorcerer; and only wanted proof to be certain of the fact."

"Well! that proof I will now give you."

The countess, who attached much more interest to this conversation than she wished to let appear, relinquished her hold of Zamore's head, in whose hair her long taper fingers had been carelessly playing.

"Give it, duke, give it," said she.

"Before my lord governor?" asked the duke.

"Vanish, Zamore," said the countess to the negro boy, who, mad with delight, made only one bound from the boudoir to the antechamber.

"An excellent step," murmured Richelieu; "then I must tell you all, countess?"

"What! did that monkey Zamore embarrass you, duke?"

"To tell the truth, countess, any one can embarrass me."

"Yes, I can understand that. But is Zamore any one?"

"Zamore is neither blind, deaf, nor dumb; therefore he is some one. I distinguish by the title of some one, every person who is my equal in the hearing, seeing, and speaking faculties, every person who can see what I do, hear and repeat what I say; every person, in short, who might betray me. This theory explained, I proceed."

"Yes, yes, duke, proceed; you will gratify me exceedingly."

"Gratify! I think not, countess; but no matter, I must go on. Well, the king was at Trianon yesterday.

"The little or the great Trianon?"

"The little. The dauphiness was leaning on his arm."

"Ah!"

"And the dauphiness, who is charming as you know——"

"Alas!"

"Coaxed him so much, with dear papa here, and dear papa there, that his majesty, who has a heart of gold, could not resist her. So after the walk came supper, and after supper amusing games; so that, in short——"

"In short," said Madame Dubarry, pale with impatience, "in short, the king did not come to Luciennes—that is what you would say?"

"Exactly."

"Oh, it is perfectly easily explained; his majesty found there all that he loves."

"Ah! by no means, and you are far from believing one word of what you say; all that pleases him he found, no doubt."

"Take care, duke, that is much worse; to sup, chat, and play is all that he wants. And with whom did he play?"

"With M. de Choiseul."

The countess made an angry gesture.

"Shall I not pursue the subject further, countess?" asked Richelieu.

"On the contrary, sir, speak on."

"You are as courageous, madame, as you are witty; let me therefore take the bull by the horns, as the Spaniards say."

"Madame de Choiseul would not forgive you for that proverb, duke."

"Yet it is not inapplicable. I told you then, madame, that M. de Choiseul, since I must name him, held the cards; and with so much good fortune, so much address——"

"That he won."

"By no means; that he lost, and that his majesty won a thousand louis-d'ors at piquet, a game on which his majesty piques himself very much, seeing that he plays it very badly."

"Oh! that Choiseul, that Choiseul!" murmured Madame Dubarry. "But Madame de Grammont was of the party also, was she not?"

"That is to say, countess, she was paying her respects before her departure."

"The duchess!"

"Yes; she is very foolish, I think."

"Why so?"

"Finding that no one persecutes her, she pouts; finding that no one exiles her, she exiles herself."

"Where to?"

"To the provinces."

"She is going to plot."

"Parbleu, what else would you expect her to do? Well, as she is about to set out, she very naturally wished to take leave of the dauphiness, who, naturally, is very fond of her. That is why she was at Trianon."

"The great?"

"Of course. The little Trianon is not yet furnished."

"Ah! her highness the dauphiness, by surrounding herself with all these Choiseuls, shows plainly which party she intends to embrace."

"No, countess, do not let us exaggerate; to-morrow the duchess will be gone."

"And the king was amused where I was absent!" cried the countess, with indignation not unmixed with terror.

"Yes; it is perfectly incredible, countess; but still it is so. Well, what do you conclude from it?"

"That you are well-informed, duke."

"Is that all?"

"No."

"Finish, then."

"I gather from it that we shall all be lost if we do not rescue the king from the clutches of these Choiseuls, either with his consent or without it."

"Alas!"

"I say we," resumed the countess; "but do not fear, duke; I speak only of our own family."

"And your friends, countess; permit me to claim that title. So then——"

"Then you are one of my friends?"

"I think I have said so, madame."

"That is not enough."

"I think I have proved it."

"That is better. And you will assist me?"

"With all my power, countess; but——"

"But what?"

"I cannot conceal from you that the task is difficult."

"Are these Choiseuls positively not to be rooted out then?"

"They are firmly planted, at least."

"Then, whatever our friend La Fontaine may say, neither wind nor storm can prevail against this oak?"

"The minister is a lofty genius."

"Bah! you speak like an encyclopedist!"

"Am I not a member of the Académie?"

"Oh! you are so slightly so."

"True, you are right; my secretary is the member, not I. But, nevertheless, I maintain my opinion."

"But may I ask in what does this mighty genius shine?"

"In this, madame, that he has made such a piece of work with the parliament and the English, that the king cannot do without him."

"The parliament? Why, he excites it against his majesty"

"Of course; therein lies his cleverness."

"He provokes the English to war."

"Of course. Peace would ruin him."

"That is not genius, duke."

"What is it then, countess?"

"It is high treason."

"When high treason is successful, countess, it is genius, and a lofty description of genius too."

"Then, by that mode of reasoning, I know some one who is as great a genius as M. de Choiseul."

"Bah!"

"Why, he has at least caused the parliament to revolt."

"You puzzle me exceedingly, countess."

"Do you not know him, duke? He belongs to your own family."

"Can I have a man of genius in my family? Do you speak of my uncle, the cardinal duke, madame?"

"No; I mean the Duke d'Aiguillon, your nephew."

"Ah! Monsieur d'Aiguillon. Yes, true, it was he who set that affair of La Chalotais moving. 'Pon honour, he is a brave youth. Yes, true; that was a tough piece of work. Countess, there is a man whom a woman of spirit should gain over to her cause."

"Are you aware, duke," said the countess, "that I do not know your nephew."

"Indeed, madame? You don't know him?"

"No; I have never seen him."

"Poor fellow! In fact, I now remember that since you came to court, he has always been at Brittany. Let him look to himself when he first sees you; he has not latterly been accustomed to the sun."

"What does he do among all those black gowns—a nobleman of spirit like him?"

"He revolutionises them, not being able to do better. You understand, countess, every one takes pleasure where they can find it, and there is not much to be had in Brittany. Ah! he is an active man. Peste! what a servant the king might have in him, if he wished. Parliament would not be insolent to him. Oh! he is a true Richelieu. Permit me, therefore, countess——"

"What?"

"To present him to you on his first appearance."

"Does he intend to visit Paris soon?"

"Oh! madame, who knows? Perhaps he will have to remain another lustre in Brittany, as that scoundrel, Voltaire, says; perhaps he is on his way hither; perhaps two hundred leagues off; or perhaps at the barrier."

And while he spoke, the marshal studied the lady's features to see what effect his words produced. But after having reflected for a moment, she said:

"Let us return to the point where we left off."

"Wherever you please, countess."

"Where were we?"

"At the moment when his majesty was enjoying himself so much at Trianon in the company of M. de Choiseul."

"And when we were speaking of getting rid of this Choiseul, duke."

"That is to say, when you were speaking of getting rid of him, countess."

"Oh! I am so anxious that he should go," said the favourite, "that I think I shall die if he remains. Will you not assist me a little, my dear duke?"

"Oh?" said Richelieu, bridling, "in politics, that is called an overture."

"Take it as you will, call it what you please, but answer categorically."

"Oh! what a long ugly adverb, in such a pretty little mouth."

"Do you call that answering, duke?"

"No, not exactly; I call that preparing my answer."

"Is it prepared?"

"Wait a little."

"You hesitate, duke?"

"Oh no!"

"Well, I am listening."

"What do you think of apologues, countess?"

"Why, that they are very antiquated."

"Bah! the sun is antiquated also, and yet we have not invented any better means of seeing."

"Well, let me hear your apologue, then; but let it be clear."

"As crystal, fair lady. Let us suppose then, countess—you know one always supposes something in an apologue."

"How tiresome you are, duke."

"You do not believe one word of what you say, countess, for you never listened to me more attentively."

"I was wrong, then; go on."

"Suppose then that you were walking in your beautiful garden at Luciennes, and that you saw a magnificent plum, one of those Queen Claudes which you are so fond of, because their vermilion and purple tints resemble your own."

"Go on, flatterer."

"Well, I was saying, suppose you saw one of these plums at the extremity of one of the loftiest branches of the tree, what would you do, countess?"

"I would shake the tree, to be sure!"

"Yes, but in vain, for the tree is large and massive, and not to be rooted out, as you said just now; and you would soon perceive that without even succeeding in shaking it, you would tear your charming little hands against its rough bark. And then you would say, reclining your head to one side in that adorable manner which belongs only to you and the flowers: 'Oh! how I wish I had this plum upon the ground!' and then you would get angry."

"That is all very natural, duke."

"I shall certainly not be the person to contradict you."

"Go on, my dear duke; your apologue is exceedingly interesting."

"All at once, when turning your little head from side to side, you perceive your friend the Duke de Richelieu, who is walking behind you, thinking."

"Of what?"

"What a question! Pardieu! of you; and you say to him with your heavenly voice: 'Oh! duke, duke!'"

"Well?"

"'You are a man; you are strong; you took Mahon; shake this devil of a plumtree for me, that I may pluck this provoking plum!' Is not that it, countess?"

"Exactly, duke; I repeated that to myself while you were saying it aloud. But what did you reply?"

"Reply? Oh! I replied: 'How you run on, countess! Certainly nothing could give me greater pleasure; but only look how firm the tree is, how knotty the branches. I have a sort of affection for my hands as well as you, though they are fifty years older than yours.'"

"Ah!" said the countess, suddenly, "yes, yes; I comprehend."

"Then finish the apologue. What did you say to me?"

"I said, 'My little marshal, do not look with indifferent eyes upon this plum, which you look at indifferently only because it is not for you. Wish for it along with me, my dear marshal; covet it along with me; and if you shake the tree properly, if the plum falls, then we will eat it together.'"

"Bravo!" exclaimed the duke, clapping his hands.

"Is that it?"

"Faith, countess, there is no one like you for finishing an apologue. By mine honour, as my deceased father used to say, it is right well tricked out."

"You will shake the tree, duke?"

"With two hands and three hearts, countess."

"And the plum was really a Queen Claude?"

"I am not quite sure of that, countess."

"What was it, then?"

"Do you know it seemed much more like a portfolio dangling from the tree."

"Then we will divide the portfolio."

"Oh no! for me alone. Do not envy me the morocco, countess. There will fall so many beautiful things from the tree along with the portfolio when I shake it, that you will not know how to choose."

"Then, marshal, it is a settled affair?"

"I am to have M. de Choiseul's place?"

"If the king consents."

"Does not the king do all you wish?"

"You see plainly he does not, since he will not send this Choiseul away."

"Oh! I trust the king will gladly recall his old companion."

"And you ask nothing for the Duke d'Aiguillon?"

"No, faith. The rascal can ask for himself."

"Besides, you will be there. And now it is my turn to ask."

"That is but just."

"What will you give me?"

"Whatever you wish."

"I want everything."

"That is reasonable."

"And shall I have it."

"What a question! But will you be satisfied, at least, and ask me for nothing farther."

"Except the merest trifle. You know M. de Taverney?"

"He is a friend of forty years' standing."

"He has a son?"

"And a daughter. Well?"

"That is all."

"How! all?"

"Yes; the other demand I have to make shall be made in proper time and place. In the mean time, we understand each other, duke?"

"Yes, countess."

"Our compact is signed."

"Nay more—it is sworn."

"Then shake the tree for me."

"Oh, rest satisfied; I have the means."

"What are they?"

"My nephew."
"What else?"
"The Jesuits."
"Oh! ho!"
"I have a very nice little plan cut and dry."
"May I know it."
"Alas! countess——"
"Well, you are right."
"You know, secrecy——"
"Is half the battle. I complete your thought for you."
"You are charming."
"But I wish to shake the tree also."
"Oh, very well; shake away, countess; it can do no harm."
"But when will you begin to undermine, duke?" asked the countess.
"To-morrow. And when do you commence to shake?"

A loud noise of carriages was heard in the court-yard, and almost immediately cries of "Long live the king!" rose on the air.

"I?" said the countess, glancing at the window, "I shall commence directly."

"Bravo!"

"Retire by the little staircase, duke, and wait in the court-yard. You shall have my answer in an hour."

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE MAKE-SHIFT OF HIS MAJESTY LOUIS XV.

LOUIS XV. was not so easy tempered that one could talk politics with him every day; for in truth politics were his aversion, and when he was in a bad temper he always escaped from them with this argument, which admitted of no reply:

"Bah! the machine will last out my time."

When circumstances were favourable, it was necessary to take advantage of them; but it rarely happened that the king did not regain the advantage which a moment of good humour had caused him to lose.

Madame Dubarry knew her king so well that, like fishermen well skilled in the dangers of the sea, she never attempted to start in bad weather.

Now the present visit of his majesty to Luciennes was one of the best opportunities possible. The king had done wrong the previous day, and knew beforehand that he should receive a scolding; he would therefore be an easy prey.

But however confiding the game which the hunter lies in wait for in his lurking-place, it has always a certain instinct which must be guarded against. But this instinct is set at nought if the sportsman knows how to manage it.

The countess managed the royal game she had in view and which she wished to capture, in the following manner:

We have said that she was in a most becoming morning-dress, like those in which Boucher represents his shepherdesses. Only she had no rouge on, for Louis XV. had a perfect antipathy to rouge.

The moment his majesty was announced, the countess seized her pot of rouge and began to rub her cheeks with it vigorously.

The king saw what the countess was doing from the ante-room.

"Fie!" said he, as he entered, "how she daubs herself!"

"Ah! good-day, sire," said the countess, without interrupting her occupations even when the king kissed her on the neck.

"You did not expect me, it seems, countess?" asked the king.

"Why do you think so, sire?"

"Because you soil your face in that manner."

"On the contrary, sire, I was certain that I should have the honour of receiving your majesty in the course of the day.

"How you say that, countess!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, you are as serious as Monsieur Rousseau when he is listening to his own music."

"That is because I have serious things to say to your majesty."

"Oh! I see what is coming, countess—reproaches."

"I reproach you, sire?—and why, pray?"

"Because I did not come yesterday."

"Oh, sire, do me the justice not to imagine that I pretend to monopolise your majesty."

"My little Jeanne, you are getting angry."

"Oh! no, sire, I am angry already."

"But hear me, countess; I assure you I never ceased thinking of you the whole time."

"Pshaw!"

"And the evening seemed interminable to me."

"But, once more, sire, I was not speaking of that at all. Your majesty may spend your evenings where you please, without consulting any one."

"Quite a family party, madame; only my own family."

"Sire, I did not even inquire."

"Why not?"

"*Dame!* you know it would be very unbecoming for me to do so."

"Well," said the king, "if that is not what you are displeased with me for, what is it, then? We must be just in this world."

"I have no complaint to make against you, sire."

"But since you are angry——"

"Yes, I am angry, sire; that is true, but it is at being made a make-shift."

"You a make-shift? Good heavens!"

"Yes, I! The Countess Dubarry! The beautiful Jeanne, the charming Jeannette, the fascinating Jeanneton, as your majesty calls me; I am a make-shift."

"But how?"

"Because I have my king, my lover, only when Madame de Choiseul and Madame de Grammont do not want him."

"Oh! oh! countess——"

"Oh, I give you my honour, sire, I say what I think. But what can you expect from me? I am an uneducated woman. I am the mistress of Blaise—the beautiful Bourbonnaise, you know."

"Countess, the Choiseuls will be revenged."

"What matter, if they revenge themselves with my vengeance?"

"They will despise us."

"You are right. Well, I have an excellent plan which I shall carry into execution at once."

"And that is?" asked the anxious king.

"Simply to go at once."

The king shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah! you do not believe me, sire?"

"No, indeed!"

"That is because you do not take the trouble to reason—you confound me with others."

"How so?"

"Madame de Chateauroux wanted to be a goddess, Madame de Pompadour aimed at being a queen. Others wished to be rich, powerful, or to humiliate the ladies of the court by the weight of their favours. I have none of these defects."

"That is true."

"But yet I have many good qualities."

"That is also true."

"Mere words, of course."

"Oh, countess! no one knows your worth better than I do."

"Well, but listen. What I am going to say will not alter your conviction."

"Speak."

"In the first place, I am rich, and independent of every one."

"Do you wish to make me regret that, countess?"

"Then I have not the least ambition for all that flatters these ladies, the least desire for what they aim at; my only wish is to love sincerely him whom I have chosen, whether he be a soldier or a king. When I love him no longer, I care for nothing else."

"Let me trust you care a little for me yet, countess."

"I have not finished, sire."

"Proceed, madame."

"I am pretty, I am young, and may reasonably hope for ten years more of beauty; and the moment I cease to be your majesty's favourite, I shall be the happiest and most honoured woman in the world. You smile, sire—I am sorry to tell you it is because you do not reflect. When you had had enough, and your people too much, of your other favourites, you sent them away, and your people blessed you and execrated the disgraced favourite more than ever; but I shall not wait until I am sent away. I shall leave the place, and make it known publicly that I have left it. I shall give a hundred thousand livres to the poor, I shall retire to a convent for a week, and in less than a month my portrait will be hung up in all the churches as that of a converted sinner."

"Oh! countess, you do not speak seriously?" said the king.

"Look at me, sire, and see if I am serious or not. I swear to you that I never was more serious in my life."

"Then you will commit this folly, Jeanne? But do you not see that by so doing you place yourself at the mercy of my whim, my lady the countess?"

"No, sire; to do so would be to say, 'choose between this and that;' whereas I say, 'adieu, sire!'—nothing more."

The king turned pale, but this time with anger.

"If you forget yourself so far, madame, take care."

"Of what, sire?"

"I shall send you to the Bastille, and you will find the Bastille rather more tiresome than a convent."

"Oh! sire," said the countess, clasping her hands, "if you would but do me that favour it would delight me!"

"Delight you? How so?"

"Yes, indeed. My secret ambition has always been to be popular, like M. de la Chalotais, or M. de Voltaire. I only want the Bastille for that. A little of the Bastille, and I shall be the happiest of women. I can then write memoirs of myself, of your ministers, of your daughters, of yourself, and transmit the virtues of Louis the Well-Beloved to the remotest posterity. Give me the lettre-de-cachet, sire. Here, I will provide the pen and ink."

And she pushed a pen and an inkstand which were upon the work-table towards the king.

The king, thus braved, reflected a moment; then, rising:

"Very well, madame," said he. "Adieu."

"My horses!" cried the countess. "Adieu, sire."

The king made a step towards the door.

"Chon!" said the countess.

Chon entered.

"My trunks, my travelling equipage, and post-horses," said she; "quick! lose no time!"

"Post-horses!" said Chon, startled. "Good heavens! what is the matter?"

"We must leave this as quickly as possible, my dear, else the king will send us to the Bastille. There is no time to be lost. Make haste, Chon, make haste."

This reproach stung Louis to the heart. He approached the countess and took her hand.

"Forgive my warmth, countess," said he.

"In truth, sire, I am surprised you did not threaten me with the gibbet."

"Oh! countess!"

"Of course. Thieves are always hung."

"Thieves?"

"Yes; do I not steal the Countess de Gramnont's place?"

"Countess!"

"*Dame!* that is my crime, sire."

"Be just, countess; you irritated me."

"And how?"

The king took her hands.

"We were both wrong. Let us forgive each other."

"Are you serious in your wish for a reconciliation, sire?"

"On my honour."

"Go, Chon."

"Without ordering anything?" asked Chon.

"No; order what I told you."

"Countess!"

"But let them wait for fresh orders."

"Ah!"

Chon left the room.

"Then you wish me to remain?" said the countess.

"Above all things."

"Reflect on what you say, sire."

The king reflected, but he could not retract; besides, he wanted to see how far the requirements of the victor would go.

"Go," said he.

"Immediately. Mark, sire! I go without asking anything."

"I observed it."

"But if I remain, I shall ask for something."

"Well, what is it? I merely ask for information."

"Ah! you know very well."

"No."

"Yes, for you make a grimace."

"M. de Choiseul's dismissal, is it?"

"Exactly."

"It is impossible, countess."

"My horses, then."

"But, ill-natured creature that you are——"

"Sign my lettre-de-cachet for the Bastille, or the letter which dismisses the minister."

"There is an alternative," said the king.

"Thanks for your clemency, sire; it seems I shall be permitted to go without being arrested."

"Countess, you are a woman."

"Fortunately I am."

"And you talk politics like an angry rebellious woman. I have no grounds for dismissing M. de Choiseul."

"I understand he is the idol of the parliament; he encourages them in their revolt."

"But there must be some pretext."

"A pretext is the reason of the weak."

"Countess, M. de Choiseul is an honest man, and honest men are rare."

"Honest! he sells you to the gentlemen of the black robe, who swallow up all the gold in the kingdom."

"No exaggeration, countess."

"Half, then."

"Good heavens!" cried Louis XV.

"But I am talking folly. What are parliaments, Choiseuls, governments to me? What is the king to me, when I am only his make-shift?"

"Once more that word!"

"Always."

"Give me two hours to consider, countess."

"Ten minutes, sire. I will retire into my apartment; slip your answer under the door—there are pen, ink, and paper. If in ten minutes you have not replied, and replied as I wish, adieu. Think no more of me—I shall be gone. If not——"

"If not?"

"Then you have once more your Jeanne."

Louis XV. kissed the hands of the countess, who, like the Parthian, threw back her most fascinating smile on him as she left the room.

The king made no opposition, and the countess locked herself into the next apartment.

Five minutes afterwards a folded paper grazed the silken mat and the rich carpet beneath the door.

The countess eagerly devoured the contents of the letter, hastily wrote some words with a pencil on a scrap of paper, and, opening the window, threw the paper to M. de Richelieu, who was walking in the little court-yard under an awning, in great trepidation lest he should be seen, and therefore keeping himself out of view as much as possible.

The marshal unfolded the paper, read it, and, in spite of his five-and-sixty years, hastily ran to the large court-yard, and jumped into his carriage.

"Coachman," said he, "to Versailles, as quick as possible!"

The paper which was thrown to M. de Richelieu from the window merely contained these words: "I have shaken the tree—the portfolio has fallen!"

CHAPTER LXXVII.

HOW KING LOUIS XV. TRANSACTED BUSINESS.

THE next day there was a great commotion at Versailles. Whenever two courtiers met there, there was nothing but mysterious signs and significant shakes of the hand, or else folded arms, and looks upwards, expressive of their grief and surprise.

M. de Richelieu, with a number of his partisans, was in the king's antechamber at Trianon, about ten o'clock.

The Count Jean, all bedizened with lace and perfectly dazzling, conversed with the old marshal, and conversed gaily, if his joyous face could be taken as testimony of the fact.

About eleven o'clock the king passed quickly through the gallery, and entered the council-chamber without speaking to any one.

At about five minutes past eleven, M. de Choiseul alighted from his carriage and crossed the gallery with his portfolio under his arm.

As he passed through the throng, there was a hurried movement amongst the courtiers, who all turned round as if talking among themselves, in order to avoid bowing to the minister.

The duke paid no attention to this manœuvre; he entered the closet where the king was turning over some papers while sipping his chocolate.

"Good morning, duke," said the king familiarly; "are we charmingly this morning?"

"Sire, M. de Choiseul is quite well, but the minister is very ill, and comes to request that your majesty, since you have not yet spoken, will accept his resignation. I thank the king for permitting me to take the initiative in this matter; it is a last favour, for which I am deeply grateful."

"How, duke? Your resignation? what does all that mean?"

"Sire, your majesty yesterday signed for Madame Dubarry an order which deposes me. This news is already spread all over Paris and Versailles. The evil is done; nevertheless, I was unwilling to leave your majesty's service without receiving a formal order with the permission. For, nominated officially, I can consider myself dismissed only by an official act."

"What! duke," exclaimed the king, laughing, for the severe and lofty attitude of M. de Choiseul made him almost tremble, "did you, a man of genius and skilled in official forms, did you believe that?"

"But, sire," said the surprised minister, "you have signed."

"What?"

"A letter, in the possession of Madame Dubarry."

"Ah! duke, have you never felt the want of peace? You are most fortunate! Madame de Choiseul must indeed be a model."

The duke, offended by the comparison, frowned.

"Your majesty," said he, "has too much firmness of character, and above all, too much tact and discretion, to mix up affairs of state with what you deign to call household matters."

"Choiseul, I must tell you how that affair happened; it is very amusing. You are aware that you are very much feared in that quarter."

"Rather say hated, sire."

"Hated if you will. Well! this madcap countess left me no alternative but to send her to the Bastille, or to thank you for your services."

"Well, sire?"

"Well, duke, you must confess that it would have been a pity to lose the sight which Versailles presents this morning. I have been amused since yesterday with seeing the couriers depart in all directions, and watching the faces brighten up or lengthen. Since yesterday Cotillon III. is queen of France. It is exceedingly amusing."

"But the end of all this, sire?"

"The end, my dear duke," said the king, seriously, "the end will always remain the same. You know me: I always seem to yield, but I never yield in reality. Let the women swallow the honoured morsel I throw them now and then, as to another Cerberus; but let us live quietly, uninterruptedly, always together. And since we are on the chapter of explanations, keep this one for yourself. Whatever report you may hear, whatever letter you may receive from me, do not absent yourself from Versailles. As long as I continue to say to you what I now do, duke, we shall be good friends."

The king extended his hand to his minister, who bowed over it, without gratitude and without anger.

"And now, my dear duke, let us to business."

"At your majesty's pleasure," replied the minister, opening his portfolio.

"Well, tell me something of these fireworks to begin with."

"Ah, that was a great disaster, sire."

"Whose fault was it?"

"M. Bignon's, the provost of the merchants."

"Did the people cry out very much?"

"Oh! very much."

"Then, perhaps we had better dismiss this M. Bignon."

"One of the members of parliament was nearly killed in the mêlée, and his colleagues therefore took the matter up warmly. But the advocate-general, Seguier, made a very eloquent speech to prove that this misfortune was the work of fate alone. His speech was applauded, and so the affair is over for the present."

"So much the better! Let us pass to the parliament, duke. Ah! we are reproached for that."

"I am blamed, sire, for not supporting M. d'Aiguillon against M. de la Chalotais. But who blames me? The very people who carried your majesty's letter about with all the demonstrations of joy. Remember, sire, that M. d'Aiguillon overstepped the bounds of his authority in Brittany, that the Jesuits were really exiled, and that M. de la Chalotais was right. Your majesty has publicly acknowledged the innocence of the attorney-general. The king cannot thus be made to stultify himself. To his minister that is nothing, but in presence of his people——!"

"In the meantime the parliament feels itself strong."

"And it is strong. How can it be otherwise? The members are reprimanded, imprisoned, persecuted, and then declared innocent! I do not accuse M. d'Aiguillon of having commenced this affair of La Chalotais, but I can never forgive him for having been in the wrong in it."

"Oh! come, duke, the evil is done, think of the remedy. How can we bridle these insolent minions?"

"Let the intrigues of the chancellor cease—let M. d'Aiguillon have no more support, and the anger of the parliament will at once subside."

"But that would be to yield, duke."

"Then your majesty is represented by M. d'Aiguillon, and not by me?"

This was a home thrust, and the king felt it.

"You know," said he, "I do not like to affront my servants, even when they have been in the wrong. But no more of this unfortunate business; time will decide who is right. Let us speak of foreign affairs. I am told we shall have a war?"

"Sire, if there be war, it will be a just and necessary war."

"With the English."

"Does your majesty fear the English?"

"Oh! upon the sea."

"Your majesty may rest tranquil. My cousin the Duke de Praslin, your minister of marine, will tell you that he has sixty-four men-of-war, not including those which are on the stocks. Besides, there are materials sufficient to construct twelve more in a year. Then there are fifty first-rate frigates—a respectable force with which to meet a naval war. For a continental war we have more than all that, we have the remembrance of Fontenoy."

"Very well; but why must I fight the English, my dear duke? A much less skilful minister than you, the Abbé Dubois, always avoided a war with England."

"I dare say, sire. The Abbé Dubois received six hundred pounds sterling per month from the English."

"Oh, duke!"

"I have the proof, sire."

"Well, be it so. But where are the grounds for war?"

"England covets all the Indies; I have been obliged to give the most stringent and hostile orders to your officers there. The first collision will call forth demands for redress from England; my official advice is that we do not listen to them. Your majesty's government must make itself respected by force, as it used to do by corruption."

"Oh, let us pocket the affront. Who will know what happens in India? It is so far from here!"

The duke bit his lips.

"There is a *casus belli* nearer home, sire," said he.

"Another? What is that?"

"The Spaniards claim the Malouine and Falkland islands. The port of Egmont was arbitrarily occupied by the English; the Spaniards drove them from it by main force. The English are enraged; they threaten the Spaniards with instant war if they do not give them satisfaction."

"Well! but if the Spaniards are in the wrong, let them unravel the knot themselves."

"And the family compact, sire? Why did you insist on the signing of this compact, which allies so closely all the Bourbons in Europe against English encroachment?"

The king hung his head.

"Do not be uneasy, sire," continued Choiseul; "you have a formidable army, an imposing fleet, and sufficient money. I can raise enough without making the people cry out. If we have a war, it will be an additional glory to your majesty's reign, and it will furnish the pretext and excuse for several aggrandisements which I have in project."

"But in that case, duke, we must have peace in the interior; let there not be war everywhere."

"But the interior is quiet, sire," replied the duke, affecting not to understand.

"No! no! you see plainly it is not. You love me and serve me well. Others say they love me, and their conduct does not at all resemble yours. Let there be concord between all shades of opinion; let me live happily, my dear duke."

"It is not my fault, sire, if your happiness is not complete."

"That is the way to speak. Well! come, then, and dine with me today."

"At Versailles, sire?"

"No; at Luciennes."

"I regret exceedingly, sire, that I cannot, but my family is in great alarm on account of the reports which were spread yesterday. They think I am in disgrace with your majesty, and I cannot let so many loving hearts suffer."

"And do those of whom I speak not suffer, duke? Remember how happily we three used to live together in the time of the poor marchioness."

The duke drooped his head, his eyes dimmed, and he uttered a half-suppressed sigh.

"Madame de Pompadour was extremely jealous of your majesty's glory, and had lofty political ideas, sire. I confess that her character sympathised strongly with my own. I often emulated and strove along with her in the great enterprises she undertook; yes, we understood each other."

"But she meddled with politics, duke, and every one blamed her for it."

"True!"

"The present one, on the contrary, is mild as a lamb; she has never yet asked me for a single lettre-de-cachet, even against the pamphleteers and sonnet writers. Well, they reproach her as if she followed in the other's footsteps. Oh, duke! it is enough to disgust one with progress.—Come, will you make your peace at Luciennes?"

"Sire, deign to assure the Countess Dubarry that I esteem her as a charming woman, and well worthy of the king's love, but——"

"Ah! a but, duke——"

"But," continued M. de Choiseul, "that my conviction is, that if your majesty is necessary for the welfare of France, a good minister is of more importance to your majesty in the present juncture than a charming mistress."

"Let us speak no more of it, duke, and let us remain good friends. But calm Madame de Grammont, and let her not lay any more plots against the countess; the women will embroil us."

"Madame de Grammont, sire, is too anxious to please your majesty; that is her failing."

"But she displeases me by annoying the countess, duke."

"Well, Madame de Grammont is going, sire; we shall see her no more. That will be an enemy the less."

"I did not mean that; you go too far. But my head burns, duke; we have worked this morning like Louis XIV. and Colbert—quite in the style of the *Grand Siècle*, as the philosophers say. Apropos, duke, are you a philosopher?"

"I am your majesty's humble servant," replied M. de Choiseul.

"You charm me; you are an invaluable man. Give me your arm, I am quite giddy."

The duke hastened to offer his arm to his majesty.

He guessed that the folding-doors would be thrown open, that the whole court was in the gallery, and that he should be seen in this triumphant position. After having suffered so much, he was not sorry to make his enemies suffer in their turn.

The usher, in fact, now opened the doors, and announced the king in the gallery.

Louis XV. crossed the gallery, leaning heavily on M. de Choiseul's arm, talking and smiling, without remarking, or seeming to remark, how pale Jean Dubarry was and how red M. de Richelieu.

But M. de Choiseul saw these shades of expression very well. With elastic step, lofty head, and sparkling eyes, he passed before the courtiers, who now approached as eagerly as they had before kept away.

"There," said the king, at the end of the gallery, "wait for me, I will take you with me to Trianon. Remember what I have told you."

"I have treasured it up in my heart," replied the minister, well knowing what a sting this cutting sentence would inflict on his enemies.

The king once more entered his apartments.

M. de Richelieu broke the file, and hastened to press the minister's hand between his meagre fingers, exclaiming: "It is long since I knew that a Choiseul bears a charmed life."

"Thank you," said the duke, who knew how the land lay.

"But this absurd report?" continued the marshal.

"The report made his majesty laugh very heartily," said Choiseul.

"I heard something of a letter——"

"A little mystification of the king's," replied the minister, glancing while he spoke at Jean, who lost countenance.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" repeated the marshal, turning to the viscount as soon as the Duke de Choiseul was out of sight.

The king ascended the staircase, calling the duke, who eagerly followed him.

"We have been played upon," said the marshal to Jean.

"Where are they going?"

"To the Little Trianon, to amuse themselves at our expense."

"Hell and furies!" exclaimed Jean.—"Ah! excuse me, marshal."

"It is now my turn," said the latter. "We shall see if my plans are more successful than those of the countess."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE LITTLE TRIANON.

WHEN Louis XIV. had built Versailles, and had felt the inconvenience of grandeur, when he saw the immense saloons full of guards, the ante-rooms thronged with courtiers, the corridors and entresols crowded with footmen, pages, and officers, he said to himself that Versailles was indeed what Louis XIV. had planned, and what Mansard, Le Brun, and Le Notre had executed—the dwelling of a deity, but not of a man. Then the Grand Monarque, who deigned to be a man in his leisure moments, built Trianon that he might breathe more freely, and enjoy a little retirement. But the sword of Achilles, which had fatigued even Achilles himself, was an insupportable burden to his puny successor.

Trianon, the miniature of Versailles, seemed yet too pompous to Louis XV., who caused the Little Trianon, a pavilion of sixty feet square, to be built by the architect Gabriel.

To the left of this building was erected an oblong square, without character and without ornament; this was the dwelling of the servants and officers of the household. It contained about ten lodgings for masters, and had accommodation for fifty servants. This building still remains entire, and is composed of a ground-floor, a first story, and attics. This ground-floor is protected by a paved moat, which separates it from the planting; and all the windows in it, as well as those of the first floor, are grated. On the side next Trianon the windows are those of a long corridor, like that of a convent.

Eight or nine doors opening from the corridor gave admittance to the different suites of apartments, each consisting of an ante-room and two closets, one to the left, the other to the right, and of one, and sometimes two, underground apartments, looking upon the inner court of the building. The upper story contains the kitchens and the attics, the chambers of the domestics. Such is the Little Trianon.

Add to this a chapel about six or seven perches from the château, which we shall not describe, because there is no necessity for our doing so, and because it is too small to deserve our notice.

The topography of the establishment is, therefore, as follows: a château looking with its large eyes upon the park and wood in front; and, on the left, looking towards the offices, which present to its gaze only the barred windows of the corridors and the thickly trellised ones of the kitchens above.

The path leading from the Great Trianon, the pompous residence of Louis XIV., to the little, was through a kitchen garden which connected the two residences by means of a wooden bridge.

It was through this kitchen and fruit garden, which La Quintinie had designed and planted, that Louis XV. conducted M. de Choiseul to the Little Trianon after the laborious council we have just mentioned. He wished to show him the improvements he had made in the new abode of the dauphin and dauphiness.

M. de Choiseul admired everything, and commented upon everything, with the sagacity of a courtier. He listened while the king told him that the Little Trianon became every day more beautiful, more charming to live in, and the minister added that it would serve as his majesty's private residence.

"The dauphiness," said the King, "is rather wild yet, like all young Germans; she speaks French well, but she is afraid of a slight accent, which to French ears betrays the Austrian. At Trianon she will see only friends, and will speak only when she wishes. The result will be that she will speak well."

"I have already had the honour to remark," said M. de Choiseul, "that her royal highness is accomplished, and requires nothing to make her perfect."

On the way, the two travellers found the dauphin standing motionless upon a lawn, measuring the sun's altitude.

M. de Choiseul bent low, but as the dauphin did not speak to him, he did not speak either.

The king said, loud enough to be heard by his grandson:

"Louis is a finished scholar, but he is wrong thus to run his head against the sciences; his wife will have reason to complain of such conduct."

"By no means, sire," replied a low, soft voice issuing from a thicket.

And the king saw the dauphiness running towards him. She had been talking to a man furnished with papers, compasses, and chalks.

"Sire," said the princess, "M. Mique, my architect."

"Ah!" exclaimed the king, "then you too are bitten by that mania, madame?"

"Sire, it runs in the family."

"You are going to build?"

"I am going to improve this great park, in which every one gets wearied."

"Oh! oh! my dear daughter, you speak too loud; the dauphin might hear you."

"It is a matter agreed upon between us, my father," replied the princess.

"To be wearied?"

"No; but to try to amuse ourselves."

"And so your highness is going to build?" asked M de Choiseul.

"I intend making a garden of this park, my lord duke."

"Ah! poor Le Nôtre!" said the king.

"Le Nôtre was a great man, sire, for what was in vogue then, but for what I love——"

"What do you love, madame?"

"Nature."

"Ah! like the philosophers."

"Or like the English."

"Good! Say that before Choiseul, and you will have a declaration of war immediately. He will let loose upon you the sixty-four ships and forty frigates of his cousin, M. de Praslin."

"Sire," said the dauphiness, "I am going to have a natural garden laid out here by Monsieur Robert, who is the cleverest man in the world in that particular branch of horticulture."

"And what do you call a natural garden?" asked the king. "I thought that trees, and flowers, and even fruit, such as I gathered as I came along, were natural objects."

"Sire, you may walk a hundred years in your grounds, and you will see nothing but straight alleys, or thickets cut off at an angle of forty-five degrees, as the dauphin says, or pieces of water wedded to lawns, which in their turn are wedded to perspectives, parterres, or terraces."

"Well, that is ugly, is it!"

"It is not natural."

"There is a little girl who loves nature!" said the king, with a jovial rather than a joyous air. "Well, come; what will you make of my Trianon?"

"Rivers, cascades, bridges, grottoes, rocks, woods, ravines, houses, mountains, fields."

"For dolls?" said the king.

"Alas! sire, for kings such as we shall be," replied the princess, without remarking the blush which overspread her grandfather's face, and without perceiving that she foretold a sad truth for herself.

"Then you will destroy; but what will you build?"

"I shall preserve the present buildings."

"Ah! your people may consider themselves fortunate that you do not intend to lodge them in these woods and rivers you speak of, like Hurons, Esquimaux, and Greenlanders. They would live a natural life there, and M. Rousseau would call them children of nature. Do that, my child, and the encyclopedists will adore you."

"Sire, my servants would be too cold in such lodgings."

"Where will you lodge them, then, if you destroy all? Not in the palace; there is scarcely room for you two there."

"Sire, I shall keep the offices as they are."

And the dauphiness pointed to the windows of the corridor which we have described.

"What do I see there?" said the king, shading his eyes with his hand.

"A woman, sire," said M. de Choiseul.

"A young lady whom I have taken into my household," replied the dauphiness.

"Mademoiselle de Taverney," said Choiseul, with his piercing glance.

"Ah!" said the king; "so you have the Taverneys here?"

"Only Mademoiselle de Taverney, sire."

"A charming girl! What do you make of her?"

"My reader."

"Very good," said the king, without taking his eye from the window through which Mademoiselle de Taverney, still pale from her illness, was looking very innocently, and without in the least suspecting that she was observed.

"How pale she is," said M. de Choiseul.

"She was nearly killed on the 31st of May, my lord duke."

"Indeed? Poor girl!" said the king. "That M. Bignon deserves to be disgraced."

"She is quite convalescent again," said M. de Choiseul, hastily.

"Thanks to the goodness of Providence, my lord."

"Ah!" said the king, "she has fled."

"She has perhaps recognised your majesty; she is very timid."

"Has she been with you long?"

"Since yesterday, sire; I sent for her when I installed myself here."

"What a melancholy abode for a young girl," said Louis. "That Gabriel was a clumsy rogue. He did not remember that the trees, as they grew, would conceal and darken this whole building."

"But I assure you, sire, that the apartments are very tolerable."

"That is impossible," said Louis XV.

"Will your majesty deign to convince yourself," said the dauphiness, anxious to do the honours of her palace.

"Very well. Will you come, Choiseul?"

"Sire, it is two o'clock. I have a parliamentary meeting at half-past two. I have only time to return to Versailles."

"Well, duke, go; and give those black-gowns a shake for me. Dauphiness, show me these little apartments if you please; I perfectly doat upon interiors."

"Come, M. Mique," said the dauphiness to her architect, "you will have an opportunity of profiting by the opinion of his majesty, who understands everything so well."

The king walked first, the dauphiness followed.

They mounted the little flight of steps which led to the chapel, avoiding the entrance of the court-yard, which was at one side. The door of the chapel is to the left; the staircase, narrow and unpretending, which leads to the corridor, on the right.

"Who lives here?" asked Louis XV.

"No one yet, sire."

"There is a key in the door of the first suite of apartments."

"Ah, yes, true. Mademoiselle de Taverney enters it to-day."

"Here?" said the king, pointing to the door.

"Yes, sire."

"And is she there at present? If so, let us not enter."

"Sire, she has just gone down; I saw her walking under the verandah of the court."

"Then show me her apartments as a specimen."

"As you please," replied the dauphiness.

And she introduced the king into the principal apartment, which was preceded by an ante-room and two closets.

Some articles of furniture which were already arranged, several books, a pianoforte, and, above all, an enormous bouquet of the most beautiful flowers, which Mademoiselle de Taverney had placed in a Chinese vase, attracted the king's attention.

"Ah!" said he, "what beautiful flowers! And yet you wish to change the garden. Who supplies your people with such splendid flowers? Do they keep some for you?"

"It is in truth a beautiful bouquet."

"The gardener takes good care of Mademoiselle de Taverney. Who is your gardener here?"

"I do not know, sire. M. de Jussieu undertook to procure them for me."

The king gave a curious glance around the apartments, looked again at the exterior, peeped into the court-yard, and went away. His majesty crossed the park, and returned to the Great Trianon, where his equipages were already in waiting for a hunt which was to take place after dinner, in carriages, from three till six o'clock.

The dauphin was still measuring the sun's altitude.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE CONSPIRACY IS RENEWED.

WHILE the king, in order to reassure M. de Choiseul and not to lose any time himself, was walking in Trianon till the chase should commence, Luciennes was the centre of a reunion of frightened conspirators, who had flown swiftly to Madame Dubarry, like birds who have smelt the sportsman's powder.

Jean and Marshal Richelieu, after having looked at each other ill-humouredly for some time, were the first to take flight. The others were the usual herd of favourites, whom the certain disgrace of the Choiseuls had allured, whom his return to favour had alarmed, and who, no longer finding the minister there to fawn upon, had returned mechanically to Luciennes, to see if the tree was yet strong enough for them to cling to as before.

Madame Dubarry was taking a siesta after the fatigues of her diplomacy, and the deceptive triumph which had crowned it, when Richelieu's carriage rolled into the court with the noise and swiftness of a whirlwind.

"Mistress Dubarry is asleep," said Zamore, without moving.

Jean sent Zamore rolling on the carpet with a scientific kick, inflicted upon the most highly ornamented portion of his governor's uniform.

Zamore screamed, and Chon hastened to inquire the cause.

"You are beating that little fellow again, you brute!" said she.

"And I shall exterminate you, too," continued Jean, with kindling eyes, "if you do not immediately awaken the countess."

But there was no need to awaken the countess; at Zamore's cries, at the growling tones of Jean's voice, she had suspected some misfortune, and hastened into the room, wrapped in a dressing-gown.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed she, alarmed at seeing Jean stretched at full length upon the sofa to calm the agitation of his bile, and at finding that the marshal did not even kiss her hand.

"The matter! the matter!" said Jean. "Parbleu! what is always the matter—the Choiseuls!"

"How!"

"Yes! mille tonnerres! firmer than ever."

"What do you mean?"

"The Count Dubarry is right," continued Richelieu; "Monsieur the Duke de Choiseul is firmer than ever."

The countess drew the king's letter from her bosom.

"And this?" said she, smiling.

"Have you read it aright, countess?" asked the marshal.

"Why, I fancy I can read, duke," replied Madame Dubarry.

"I do not doubt it, madame. Will you allow me to read it also?"

"Oh, certainly; read."

The duke took the paper, unfolded it slowly, and read:

"To-morrow I shall thank M. de Choiseul for his services. I promise it positively. "LOUIS."

"Is that clear?" said the countess.

"Perfectly clear," replied the marshal, with a grimace.

"Well! what?" said Jean.

"Well! It is to-morrow that we shall be victorious, and nothing is lost as yet."

"How! To-morrow? The king signed that yesterday, therefore to-morrow is to-day."

"Pardon me, madame," said the duke; "as there is no date to the note, to-morrow will always be the day after you wish to see M. de Choiseul dismissed. In the Rue de la Grange-Batalière, about one hundred paces from my house, there is a tavern, on the signboard of which is written in red characters, 'Credit given to-morrow.' To-morrow—that is, never."

"The king mocks us!" said Jean, furiously.

"Impossible," said the alarmed countess; "impossible! Such a trick would be unworthy——"

"Ah, madame, his majesty is so merry," said Richelieu.

"He shall pay for this, duke," said the countess, in a tone of anger.

"After all, countess, we must not be angry with the king: we cannot accuse his majesty of cheating or tricking us, for the king has performed what he promised."

"Oh!" said Jean, with a more than vulgar shrug of his shoulders.

"What did he promise?" cried the countess. "To thank Choiseul for his services."

"And that is precisely what he has done, madame. I heard his majesty myself thank the duke for his services. The word has two meanings; in diplomacy, each takes the one he prefers. You have chosen yours, the king has chosen his. Therefore there is no more question of to-morrow. It is to-day, according to your opinion, that the king should have kept

his promise, and he has done so. I who speak to you heard him thank Choiseul."

"Duke, this is no time for jesting, I think."

"Do you think I am jesting, countess? Ask Count Jean."

"No, by heaven! We were in no humour for laughing this morning when Choiseul was embraced, flattered, feasted by the king, and even now he is walking arm in arm with him in Trianon."

"Arm in arm!" exclaimed Chon, who had slipped into the room, and who raised her snowy arms like a second Niobe in despair.

"Yes, I have been tricked,' said the countess; "but we shall see. Chon, countermand my carriage for the chase. I shall not go."

"Good!" said Jean.

"One moment," cried Richelieu. "No hurry, no pouting. Ah! forgive me, countess, for daring to advise you; I entreat you to pardon me."

"Go on, duke; do not apologise. I think I am losing my senses. See how I am placed; I did not wish to meddle with politics, and the first time I touch upon them, self-love launches me so deeply. You were saying——"

"That pouting would not be wise now. The position is difficult, countess. If the king is so decidedly in favour of these Choiseuls, if the dauphiness has so much influence over him, if he thus openly breaks a lance with you, you must——"

"Well, what?"

"You must be even more amiable than you are at present, countess. I know it is impossible; but in a position like ours the impossible becomes necessary. Attempt the impossible, then."

The countess reflected.

"For, in short," said the duke, "if the king should adopt German manners——"

"If he should become virtuous!" exclaimed Jean horrified.

"Who knows, countess?" said Richelieu; "novelty is such an attractive thing."

"Oh! as for that," replied the countess, with a nod of incredulity, "I do not believe it."

"More extraordinary things have happened, countess. You know the proverb of the devil turning hermit. So you must not pout."

"But I am suffocating with rage."

"Parbleu! countess, I can believe you; but suffocate before us, breathe freely before the enemy. Do not let the king, that is to say, M. de Choiseul, perceive your anger."

"And shall I go to the chase?"

"It would be most politic."

"And you, duke?"

"Oh, I? If I should have to crawl on all-fours, I shall go.

"Come in my carriage, then!" cried the countess, to see what face her ally would put on.

"Oh, countess," replied the duke, smirking to hide his vexation, "it is such an honour——"

"That you refuse?"

"I? Heaven forbid! But, take care; you will compromise yourself."

"He confesses it—he dares to confess it," cried Madame Dubarry.

"Countess! countess! M. de Choiseul will never forgive me."

"Are you already on such good terms with M. de Choiseul?"

"Countess, I shall get into disgrace with the dauphiness."

"Would you rather we should each continue the war separately, without sharing the spoil?" It is still time. You are not compromised, and you may yet withdraw from the association."

"You misunderstand me, countess," said the duke, kissing her hands. "Did I hesitate on the day of your presentation to send you a dress, a hairdresser, and a carriage? Well, I shall not hesitate any more to-day. I am bolder than you imagine, countess."

"Then it is agreed. We will go to this hunt together, and that will serve me as a pretext for not seeing or speaking to any one."

"Not even to the king?"

"Oh! on the contrary, I shall give him such sweet words that he will be in despair."

"Bravo! that is good tactics."

"But you, Jean, what are you doing there? Do endeavour to rise from those cushions; you are burying yourself alive, my good friend."

"You want to know what I am doing, do you? Well, I am thinking——"

"Of what?"

"I am thinking that all the ballad-writers of the town and the parliament are setting us to all possible tunes; that the *Nouvelles à la main* is cutting us up like meat for pies; that the *Gazetier Cuirassé* is piercing us for want of a cuirass; that the *Journal des Observateurs* observes us even to the marrow of our bones; that, in short, to-morrow we shall be in so pitiable a state that even a Choiseul might pity us."

"And what is the result of your reflections?" asked the duke.

"Why, that I must hasten to Paris to buy a little lint and no inconsiderable quantity of ointment to put upon our wounds. Give me some money, my little sister."

"How much?" asked the countess.

"A trifle; two or three hundred louis."

"You see, duke," said the countess, turning to Richelieu, "that I am already paying the expenses of the war."

"That is only the beginning of the campaign, and what you sow to-day, to-morrow you will reap."

The countess shrugged her shoulders slightly, rose, went to her chiffonière, and, opening it, took out a handful of banknotes, which, without counting them, she handed to Jean, who, also without counting them, pocketed them with a deep sigh.

Then, rising, yawning, and stretching himself like a man overwhelmed with fatigue, he took a few steps across the room.

"See," said he, pointing to the duke and the countess, "these people are going to amuse themselves at the chase, while I have to gallop to Paris. They will see gay cavaliers and lovely women, and I shall see nothing but hideous faces of scribbling drudges. Certainly, I am the turnspit of the establishment."

"Mark me, duke," said the countess, "he will never bestow a thought on us. Half my bank-notes will be squandered on some opera girl, and the rest will disappear in a gambling-house. That is his errand to Paris, and yet he bemoans himself, the wretch! Leave my sight, Jean, you disgust me."

Jean emptied three plates of bonbons, stuffed the contents into his pockets, stole a Chinese figure with diamond eyes from the landing, and stalked off with a most majestic strut, pursued by the exclamations of the countess.

"What a delightful youth!" said Richelieu, in the tone of a parasite who praises a spoiled brat, while all the time he is inwardly devoting him to the infernal regions; "he is very dear to you, I suppose, countess?"

"As you say, duke, he has fixed all his happiness in me, and the speculation brings him three or four hundred thousand livres a-year."

The clock struck.

"Half-past twelve, countess," said the duke. "Luckily you are almost dressed. Show yourself a little to your courtiers, who might otherwise think there was an eclipse, and then let us to our carriages. You know how the chase is ordered?"

"His majesty and I arranged it yesterday; they were to proceed to the forest of Marly and take me up in passing."

"Oh! I am very sure the king has not changed the programme."

"In the meantime, duke, let me hear your plan; it is your turn now."

"Madame, I wrote yesterday to my nephew, who, if I may believe my presentiments, is already on his way hither."

"M. d'Aiguillon?"

"I should not be surprised if he crosses my letter on the road, and if he were here to-morrow or the day after at the latest."

"Then you calculate upon him?"

"Oh! madame, he does not want for sense."

"No matter who it is, for we are at the last extremity. The king might perhaps submit, but he has such a dreadful antipathy to business."

"So that——"

"So that I fear he will never consent to give up M. de Choiseul."

"Shall I speak frankly to you, countess?"

"Certainly."

"Well! I think so too. The king will find a hundred stratagems like that of yesterday. His majesty has so much wit! And then, on your side, countess, you will never risk losing his love for the sake of an unaccountable whim."

And while he spoke the marshal fixed a searching glance on Madame Dubarry.

"*Dame!* I must reflect upon that."

"You see, countess, M. de Choiseul is there for an eternity; nothing but a miracle can dislodge him."

"Yes, a miracle," repeated Jeanne.

"And unfortunately we are not now in the age of miracles."

"Oh!" said Madame Dubarry, "I know some one who can work miracles yet."

"You know a man who can work miracles, and yet you did not tell me so before?"

"I only thought of it this moment, duke."

"Do you think he could assist us in this affair?"

"I think he can do everything."

"Oh! indeed? And what miracle has he worked? Tell me, that I may judge of his skill by the specimen."

"Duke," said Madame Dubarry, approaching Richelieu and involuntarily lowering her voice, "he is a man who, ten years ago, met me upon the Place Louis XV. and told me I should be Queen of France."

"Indeed! that is in truth miraculous; and could he tell me, think you, if I shall die prime minister?"

"Don't you think so?"

"Oh, I don't doubt it in the least. What is his name?"

"His name will tell you nothing."
"Where is he?"
"Ah! that I don't know."
"He did not give you his address?"
"No; he was to come to me for his recompense."
"What did you promise him?"
"Whatever he should ask."
"And he has not come?"
"No."
"Countess, that is even more miraculous than his prediction. We must certainly have this man."
"But how shall we proceed?"
"His name, countess—his name?"
"He has two."
"Proceed according to order—the first?"
"The Count de Fenix."
"What! the man you pointed out to me on the day of your presentation?"
"Yes; the Prussian officer."
"Oh! I have no longer any faith in him. All the sorcerers I have ever known had names ending in *i* or *o*."
"That exactly suits, duke; for his second name is Joseph Balsamo."
"But have you no means of finding him out?"
"I shall task my brain, duke. I think I know some one who knows him."
"Good! But make haste, countess. It is now a quarter to one."
"I am ready. My carriage, there!"
Ten minutes afterwards Madame Dubarry and M. de Richelieu were seated side by side, and driving rapidly on their way to the hunting party.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE SORCERER CHASE.

A LONG train of carriages filled the avenues of the forest of Marly, where the king was hunting. It was what was called the afternoon chase.

In the latter part of his life, Louis XV. neither shot at nor rode after the game; he was content with watching the progress of the chase.

Those of our readers who have read Plutarch, will perhaps remember that cook of Mark Antony's, who put a boar on the spit every hour, so that among the six or seven boars which were roasting, there might always be one ready whenever Mark Antony wished to dine.

The reason of this was that Mark Antony, as governor of Asia Minor, was overwhelmed with business; he was the dispenser of justice, and as the Sicilians are great thieves (the fact is confirmed by Juvenal), Mark Antony had abundance of work on his hands. He had therefore always five or six roasts in various degrees of progress on the spit, waiting for the moment when his functions as judge would permit him to snatch a hasty morsel.

Louis XV. acted in a similar manner. For the afternoon chase there were three or four stags started at different hours, and accordingly as the king felt disposed he chose a nearer or more distant "view halloo."

On this day his majesty had signified his intention of hunting until four o'clock. A stag was therefore chosen which had been started at twelve, and which might consequently be expected to run until that hour.

Madame Dubarry, on her side, intended to follow the king as faithfully as the king intended to follow the stag. But hunters propose and fate disposes. A combination of circumstances frustrated this happy project of Madame Dubarry's, and the countess found in fate an adversary almost as capricious as herself.

Whilst the countess, talking politics with M. de Richelieu, drove rapidly after the king, who in his turn drove rapidly after the stag, and whilst the duke and she returned in part the bows which greeted them as they passed, they all at once perceived about fifty paces from the road, beneath a magnificent canopy of verdure, an unfortunate calèche revolving its wheels in the air, while the two black horses which should have drawn it were peaceably munching, the one the bark of a beech-tree, the other the moss growing at his feet.

Madame Dubarry's horses, a magnificent pair presented to her by the king, had outstripped all the other carriages, and were the first to arrive in sight of the broken carriage.

"Ha! an accident!" said the countess, calmly.

"Faith, yes!" said the Duke de Richelieu, with equal coolness, for sensibility is little in fashion at court; "the carriage is broken to pieces."

"Is that a corpse upon the grass?" asked the countess. "Look, duke."

"I think not, it moves."

"Is it a man or a woman?"

"I don't know. I cannot see well."

"Ha! it bows to us."

"Then it cannot be dead."

And Richelieu at all hazards took off his hat.

"But, countess," said he, "it seems to me——"

"And to me also——"

"That it is his Eminence Prince Louis."

"The Cardinal de Rohan in person!"

"What the deuce is he doing there?" asked the duke.

"Let us go and see," replied the countess. "Champagne, drive on to the broken carriage."

The coachman immediately left the high road and dashed in among the lofty trees.

"Faith, yes, it is my lord cardinal," said Richelieu.

It was in truth his eminence, who was lying stretched upon the grass, waiting until some of his friends should pass.

Seeing Madame Dubarry approach, he rose.

"A thousand compliments to the countess!" said he.

"How, cardinal! is it you?"

"Myself, madame."

"On foot?"

"No, sitting."

"Are you wounded?"

"Not in the least."

"And how in all the world do you happen to be in this position?"

"Do not speak of it, madame; that brute of a coachman, a wretch whom I sent for to England, when I told him to cut across the wood in order to join the chase, turned so suddenly, that he upset me and broke my best carriage."

"You must not complain, cardinal," said the countess; "a French coachman would have broken your neck, or at least your ribs."

"Very possibly."

"Therefore, be consoled."

"Oh! I am a little of a philosopher, countess; only I shall have to wait, and that is fatal."

"How, prince! to wait? A Rohan wait?"

"There is no resource."

"Oh, no! I would rather alight and leave you my carriage."

"In truth, madame, your kindness makes me blush."

"Come, jump in, prince—jump in."

"No, thank you, madame, I am waiting for Soubise, who is at the chase, and who cannot fail to pass in a few moments."

"But if he should have taken another road?"

"Oh! it is of no consequence."

"My lord, I entreat you will."

"No, thank you."

"But why not?"

"I am unwilling to incommode you."

"Cardinal, if you refuse to enter, I shall order one of the footmen to carry my train, and I shall roam through the woods like a Dryad."

The cardinal smiled, and thinking that a longer resistance might be interpreted unfavourably by the countess, he consented to enter the carriage. The duke had already given up his place, and taken his seat upon the bench in front. The cardinal entreated him to resume his former position, but the duke was inflexible.

The countess's splendid horses soon made up for the time which had thus been lost.

"Excuse me, my lord," said the countess, addressing the cardinal, "has your eminence been reconciled to the chase?"

"How so?"

"Because this is the first time I have had the pleasure of seeing you join in that amusement."

"By no means, countess. I had come to Versailles to have the honour of paying my respects to his majesty, when I was told he was at the chase. I had to speak to him on some important business, and therefore followed, hoping to overtake him; but, thanks to this cursed coachman, I shall not only lose his majesty's ear, but also my assignation in town."

"You see, madame," said the duke, laughing, "monseigneur makes a free confession!—he has an assignation."

"In which I shall fail, I repeat," replied the cardinal.

"Does a Rohan, a prince, a cardinal, ever fail in anything?" said the countess.

"Dame!" said the prince, "unless a miracle comes to my assistance."

The duke and the countess looked at each other; this word recalled their recent conversation.

"Faith! prince," said the countess, "speaking of miracles, I will confess frankly that I am very happy to meet a dignitary of the church, to know if he believes in them."

"In what, madame?"

"Parbleu! in miracles," said the duke.

"The scriptures give them as an article of faith, madame," said the cardinal, trying to look devout.

"Oh! I do not mean those miracles," replied the countess.

"And of what other miracles do you speak, madame?"

"Of modern miracles."

"Those indeed, I confess, are rather more rare," said the cardinal. "But still——"

"But still, what?"

"Faith, I have seen things, which, if they were not miraculous, were at least very incredible."

"You have seen such things, prince?"

"On my honour."

"But you know, madame," said Richelieu, laughing, "that his eminence is said to be in communication with spirits, which, perhaps, is not very orthodox."

"No, but which must be very convenient," said the countess. "And what have you seen, prince?"

"I have sworn not to reveal it."

"Oh! that begins to look serious."

"It is a fact, madame."

"But if you have promised to observe secrecy respecting the sorcery, perhaps you have not done so as regards the sorcerer?"

"No."

"Well, then, prince, I must tell you that the duke and myself came out to-day with the intention of seeking some magician."

"Indeed?"

"Upon my honour."

"Take mine."

"I desire no better."

"He is at your disposal, countess."

"And at mine also, prince?"

"And at yours also, duke."

"What is his name?"

"The Count de Fenix."

The countess and the duke looked at each other and turned pale.

"That is strange," said they, both together.

"Do you know him?" asked the prince.

"No. And you think him a sorcerer?"

"I am positive of it."

"You have spoken to him, then?"

"Of course."

"And you found him——"

"Perfect."

"On what occasion, may I ask?"

The cardinal hesitated.

"On the occasion of his foretelling my fortune."

"Correctly?"

"He told me things of the other world."

"Has he no other name than the Count de Fenix?"

"I think I have heard him called——"

"Speak, sir," said the countess, impatiently.

"Joseph Balsamo, madame."

"Is the devil very black?" asked Madame Dubarry all at once.

"The devil, countess? I have not seen him."

"What are you thinking of, countess?" cried Richelieu. "Pardieu! that would be respectable company for a cardinal."

"And did he tell you your fortune without showing you the devil?"

"Oh! certainly," said the cardinal, "they only show the devil to people of no consideration; we can dispense with him."

"But say what you will, prince," continued Madame Dubarry, "there must be a little devilry at the bottom of it."

"Dame! I think so."

"Blue fire, spectres, infernal caldrons which smell horribly while they burn, eh?"

"Oh, no! my sorcerer is most polite and well-bred; he is a very gallant man, and receives his visitors in good style."

"Will you not have your horoscope drawn by this man, countess?" said Richelieu.

"I long to do so, I confess."

"Do so, then, madame."

"But where is all this accomplished?" asked Madame Dubarry, hoping that the cardinal would give her the wished-for address.

"In a very handsome room, fashionably furnished."

The countess could scarcely conceal her impatience.

"Very well," said she; "but the house?"

"A very fine house, though in a singular style of architecture."

The countess stamped with rage at being so ill understood. Richelieu came to her assistance.

"But do you not see, my lord," said he, "that madame is dying to know where your sorcerer lives?"

"Where he lives, you say? Oh! well," replied the cardinal, "eh! faith—wait a moment—no—yes—no. It is in the Marais, near the corner of the boulevard, Rue St. François—St. Anastasie—no. However, it is the name of some saint."

"But what saint. You must surely know them all?"

"No, faith. I know very little about them," said the cardinal; "but stay—my fool of a footman must remember."

"Oh! very fortunately he got up behind," said the duke. Stop, Champagne, stop."

And the duke pulled the cord which was attached to the coachman's little finger, who suddenly reined in the foaming horses, throwing them on their sinewy haunches.

"Olive," said the cardinal, "are you there, you scoundrel?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Where did I stop one evening in the Marais—a long time back?"

The lacquey had overheard the whole conversation, but took care not to appear as if he had done so.

"In the Marais?" said he, seeming to search his memory.

"Yes, near the boulevards."

"What day, my lord?"

"One day when I was returning from St. Denis. The carriage, I think, waited for me in the boulevards."

"Oh, yes, my lord," said Olive, "I remember now. A man came and threw a very heavy parcel into the carriage; I remember it perfectly."

"Very possibly," replied the cardinal, "but who asked you about that, you scoundrel?"

"What does your eminence wish, then?"

"To know the name of the street."

"Rue St. Claude, my lord."

"Claude, that is it!" cried the cardinal. "I would have laid any wager it was the name of a saint."

"Rue St. Claude!" repeated the countess, darting such an expressive glance at Richelieu, that the marshal, fearing to let any one guess his secrets, above all when it concerned a conspiracy, interrupted Madame Dubarry by these words:

"Ha! countess—the king!"

"Where?"

"Yonder."

"The king! the king!" exclaimed the countess. "To the left, Champagne, to the left, that his majesty may not see us."

"And why, countess?" asked the astonished cardinal. "I thought that, on the contrary, you were taking me to his majesty."

"Oh! true, you wish to see the king, do you not?"

"I came for that alone, madame."

"Very well! you shall be taken to the king——"

"But you?"

"Oh! we shall remain here."

"But, countess——"

"No, apologies, prince, I entreat; every one to his own business. The king is yonder, under those chestnut-trees; you have business with the king; very well, the affair is easily arranged. Champagne!"

Champagne pulled up.

"Champagne, let us alight here, and take his eminence to the king."

"What! alone, countess?"

"You wished to have an audience of his majesty, cardinal?"

"It is true."

"Well! you shall have his ear entirely to yourself."

"Ah! this kindness absolutely overwhelms me." And the prelate gallantly kissed Madame Dubarry's hand.

"But where will you remain yourself, madame?" inquired he.

"Here, under these trees."

"The king will be looking for you."

"So much the better."

"He will be uneasy at not seeing you."

"And that will torment him—just what I wish."

"Countess, you are positively adorable."

"That is precisely what the king says when I have tormented him. Champagne, when you have taken his eminence to the king, you will return at full gallop."

"Yes, my lady."

"Adieu, duke," said the cardinal.

"Au revoir, my lord," replied the duke.

And the valet having let down the step, the duke alighted and handed out the countess, who leaped to the ground as lightly as a nun escaping from a convent, while the carriage rapidly bore his eminence to the hillock from which his most Christian majesty was seeking, with his short-sighted eyes, the naughty countess whom every one had seen but himself.

Madame Dubarry lost no time. She took the duke's arm, and drawing him into the thicket,—

"Do you know," said she, "that it must have been Providence who sent that dear cardinal to us, to put us on the trace of our man!"

"Then we are positively to go to him?"

"I think so; but——"

"What, countess?"

"I am afraid, I confess it."

"Of whom?"

"Of the sorcerer. Oh, I am very credulous."

"The deuce!"

"And you, do you believe in sorcerers?"

"Dame! I can't say no, countess."

"My history of the prediction——"

"Is a startling fact. And I myself," said the old marshal, scratching his ear, "once met a certain sorcerer."

"Bah!"

"Who rendered me a very important service."

"What service, duke?"

"He resuscitated me"

"He resuscitated you!"

"Certainly; I was dead, no less."

"Oh! tell me the whole affair, duke."

"Let us conceal ourselves, then."

"Duke, you are a dreadful coward."

"Oh no, I am only prudent."

'Are we well placed here?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Well! the story! the story!"

"Well, I was at Vienna—it was the time when I was ambassador there—when one evening, while I was standing under a lamp, I received a sword thrust through my body. It was a rival's sword, and a very unwholesome sort of thing it is, I assure you. I fell—I was taken up—I was dead."

"What? you were dead?"

"Yes, or close upon it. A sorcerer passes, who asks who is the man whom they are carrying. He is told it is I; he stops the litter, pours three drops of some unknown liquid into the wound, three more between my lips, and the bleeding stops, respiration returns, my eyes open, and I am cured."

"It is a miracle from heaven, duke."

"That is just what frightens me; for, on the contrary, I believe it is a miracle of the devil."

"True, marshal, Providence would not have saved a dissipated rake like you. Honour to whom honour is due. And does your sorcerer still live?"

"I doubt it, unless he has found the elixir of life."

"Like you, marshal?"

"Do you believe these stories, then?"

"I believe everything. He was old?"

"Methuselah in person."

"And his name?"

"Ah! a magnificent Greek name—Althotas."

"What a terrible name, marshal!"

"Is it not, madame?"

"Duke, there is the carriage returning. Are we decided? Shall we go to Paris and visit the Rue St. Claude?"

"If you like. But the king is waiting for you."

"That would determine me, duke, if I had not already determined. He has tormented me. Now, France, it is your turn to suffer!"

"But he will think you are lost—carried off."

"And so much the more that I have been seen with you, marshal."

"Stay, countess, I will be frank with you; I am afraid.

"Of what?"

"I am afraid that you will tell all this to some one, and that I shall be laughed at."

"Then we shall both be laughed at together, since I go with you."

"That decides me, countess. However, if you betray me, I shall say——"

"What will you say?"

"I shall say that you came with me tête-à-tête."

"No one will believe you, duke."

"Ah! countess, if the king were not there!"

"Champagne! Champagne! Here, behind this thicket, that we may not be seen. Germain, the door. That will do. Now to Paris, Rue St. Claude, in the Marais, and let the pavement smoke for it."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE COURIER.

It was six o'clock in the evening. In that chamber in the Rue Saint Claude into which we have already introduced our readers, Balsamo was seated beside Lorenza, now awake, and was endeavouring by persuasion to soften her rebellious spirit, which refused to listen to all his prayers.

But the young girl looked askance at him, as Dido looked at Æneas when he was about to leave her, spoke only to reproach him, and moved her hand only to repulse his.

She complained that she was a prisoner, a slave; that she could no longer breathe the fresh air, nor see the sun. She envied the fate of the poorest creatures, of the birds, of the flowers. She called Balsamo her tyrant.

Then, passing from reproaches to rage, she tore into shreds the rich stuffs which her husband had given her, in order by this semblance of gaiety and show to cheer the solitude he imposed on her.

Balsamo, on the other hand, spoke gently to her, and looked at her lovingly. It was evident that this weak, irritable creature filled an immense place in his heart, if not in his life.

"Lorenza," said he to her, "my beloved, why do you display this spirit of resistance and hostility? Why will you not live with me, who love you inexpressibly, as a gentle and devoted companion? You would then have nothing to wish for; you would be free to bloom in the sun like the flowers of which you spoke just now; to stretch your wing like the birds whose fate you envy. We would go everywhere together. You would not only see the sun which delights you so much, but the factitious sun of splendour and fashion—those assemblies to which the women of this country resort. You would be happy according to your tastes, while rendering me happy in mine. Why will you refuse this happiness, Lorenza?—you who, with your beauty and riches, would make so many women envious?"

"Because I abhor you," said the haughty young girl.

Balsamo cast on Lorenza a glance expressive at once of anger and pity.

"Live, then, as you condemn yourself to live," said he; "and since you are so proud, do not complain."

"I should not complain, if you would leave me alone. I should not

complain, if you did not force me to speak to you. Do not come into my presence, or when you do enter my prison, do not speak to me, and I shall do as the poor birds from the south do when they are imprisoned in cages —they die, but do not sing."

Balsamo made an effort to appear calm.

"Come, Lorenza," said he, "a little more gentleness and resignation. Look into a heart which loves you above all things. Do you wish for books?"

"No."

"Why not? Books would amuse you."

"I wish to weary myself until I die."

Balsamo smiled, or rather endeavoured to smile.

"You are mad," said he; "you know very weil that you cannot die while I am here to take care of you, and to cure you when you fall ill."

"Oh!" cried Lorenza, "you will not cure me when you find me strangled with this scarf against the bars of my window."

Balsamo shuddered.

"Or when," continued she, furiously, "I have opened this knife and stabbed myself to the heart."

Balsamo, pale as death, and bathed in cold perspiration, gazed at Lorenza, and with a threatening voice:

"No, Lorenza," said he, "you are right; I shall not cure you, then, I shall bring you back to life."

Lorenza gave a cry of terror. She knew no bounds to Balsamo's power, and believed his threat. Balsamo was saved. While she was plunged in this fresh abyss of suffering which she had not foreseen, and while her vacillating reason saw itself encircled by a never-ceasing round of torture, the sound of the signal-bell pulled by Fritz reached Balsamo's ear. It struck three times quickly, and at regular intervals.

"A courier," said he.

Then after a pause another ring was heard.

"And in haste," he said.

"Ah!" said Lorenza, "you are about to leave me, then!"

He took the young girl's cold hand in his. "Once more and for the last time, Lorenza," said he, "let us live on good terms with each other, like brother and sister. Since destiny unites us to each other, let us make it a friend and not an executioner."

Lorenza did not reply. Her eye, motionless and fixed in a sort of dreamy melancholy, seemed to seek some thought which was ever flying from her into infinite space, and which perhaps she could not find because she had sought it too long and too earnestly, like those who, after having lived in darkness, gaze too ardently on the sun, and are blinded by excess of light. Balsamo took her hand and kissed it without her giving any sign of life. Then he advanced towards the chimney. Immediately Lorenza started from her torpor, and eagerly fixed her gaze upon him.

"Oh!" said he, "you wish to know how I leave this, in order to leave it one day after me and flee from me as you threatened. And therefore you awake—therefore you look at me."

Then, passing his hand over his forehead, as if he imposed a painful task on himself, he stretched his hand towards the young girl, and said, in a commanding voice, looking at her as if he were darting a javelin against her head and breast:

"Sleep!"

The word was scarcely uttered when Lorenza bent like a flower upon

its stem; her head, for a single moment unsteady, drooped and rested against the cushion of the sofa; her hands, of an opaque and waxen whiteness, glided down her side, rustling her silken dress.

Balsamo, seeing her so beautiful, approached her and pressed his lips upon her lovely forehead.

Then Lorenza's features brightened, as if a breath from the God of Love himself had swept away the cloud which rested on her brow. Her lips opened tremulously, her eyes swam in voluptuous tears, and she sighed as the angels must have sighed when in earth's youthful prime they stooped to love the children of men.

Balsamo looked upon her for a moment, as if unable to withdraw his gaze; then, as the bell sounded anew, he turned towards the chimney, touched a spring, and disappeared behind the flowers.

Fritz was waiting for him in the saloon, with a man dressed in the closely-fitting jacket of a courier, and wearing thick boots armed with long spurs.

The commonplace and inexpressive features of this man showed him to be one of the people; but his eye had in it a spark of sacred fire, which seemed to have been breathed into him by some superior intelligence.

His left hand grasped a short and knotty whip, while with his right hand he made some signs to Balsamo, which the latter instantly recognised, and to which, without speaking, he replied by touching his forehead with his forefinger.

The postilion's hand moved upwards to his breast, where it traced another sign, which an indifferent observer would not have remarked, so closely did it resemble the movement made in fastening a button.

To this sign the master replied by showing a ring which he wore upon his finger.

Before this powerful signet the messenger bent his knee.

"Whence come you?" asked Balsamo.

"From Rouen, master."

"What is your profession?"

"I am a courier in the service of the Duchess de Grammont."

"Who placed you there?"

"The will of the Great Copht."

"What orders did you receive when you entered the service?"

"To have no secret from the master."

"Whither are you going?"

"To Versailles."

"What are you carrying?"

"A letter."

"For whom?"

"For the minister."

"Give it me."

The courier took a letter from a leathern bag fastened upon his shoulders behind, and gave it to Balsamo.

"Shall I wait?" asked he.

"Yes."

"Very well."

"Fritz!"

The German appeared.

"Keep Sebastian concealed in the offices."

"He knows my name," murmured the adept, with superstitious fear.

"He knows everything," said Fritz, drawing him away.

When Balsamo was once more alone, he looked at the unbroken, deeply-cut seal of the letter, which the imploring glance of the messenger had entreated him to respect as much as possible. Then, slowly and pensively, he once more mounted towards Lorenza's apartment, and opened the door of communication.

Lorenza was still sleeping, but seemingly tired and enervated by inaction. He took her hand, which she closed convulsively, and then he placed the letter, sealed as it was, upon her heart.

"Do you see?" he asked.

"Yes, I see," replied Lorenza.

"What is the object which I hold in my hand?"

"A letter."

"Can you read it?"

"I can."

"Do so, then."

With closed eyes and palpitating bosom, Lorenza repeated, word for word, the following lines, which Balsamo wrote down as she spoke:

"DEAR BROTHER,—

"As I had foreseen, my exile will be at least of some service to us. I have this morning seen the president of Rouen; he is for us, but timid. I urged him in your name; he has at last decided, and the remonstrance of his division will be in Versailles within a week. I am just about setting off for Rennes to rouse Karadeuc and La Chalotais, who are sleeping on their post. Our agent from Caudebec was in Rouen. I have seen him. England will not stop midway; she is preparing a sharp notification for the cabinet of Versailles. X—— asked me if he should produce it, and I authorised him to do so. You will receive the last pamphlets of Morando and Delille against the Dubarry. They are petards which might blow up a town. A sad report reached me, that there was disgrace in the air; but as you have not written to me, I laugh at it. Do not leave me in doubt, however, and reply courier for courier. Your message will find me at Caen, where I have some of our gentlemen riding quarantine. Adieu, I salute you.

"DUCHESS DE GRAMMONT."

After reading thus far, Lorenza stopped.

"You see nothing more?" asked Balsamo.

"I see nothing."

"No postscript?"

"No."

Balsamo, whose brow had gradually smoothed as Lorenza read the letter, now took it from her.

"A curious document," said he, "and one for which I would be well paid. Oh! how can any one write such things," he continued. "Yes, it is always women who are the ruin of great men. This Choiseul could not have been overthrown by an army of enemies, by a world of intrigues, and now the breath of a woman crushes while it caresses him. Yes, we all perish by the treachery or the weakness of women. If we have a heart, and in that heart a sensitive chord, we are lost."

And, as he spoke, Balsamo gazed with inexpressible tenderness at Lorenza, who palpitated under his glance.

"Is it true, what I think?" said he.

"No, no, it is not true!" she replied eagerly; "you see plainly that I

love you too dearly to do you any hurt, like those women you spoke of, without sense and without heart."

Balsamo allowed himself to be caressed by the arms of his enchantress:—all at once a double ring of Fritz's bell was repeated twice.

"Two visits," said Balsamo.

A single violent ring completed the telegraphic message.

"Important ones," continued the master; and, disengaging himself from Lorenza's arms, he hastened from the apartment, leaving the young girl still asleep. On his way he met the courier, who was waiting for orders.

"Here is your letter," said he.

"What must I do with it?"

"Deliver it as addressed."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

The courier looked at the envelope and at the seal, and seeing them as intact as when he had brought them, expressed his satisfaction, and disappeared in the darkness.

"What a pity not to keep such an autograph," said Balsamo, "and, above all, what a pity not to be able to forward it by a safe hand to the king."

Fritz now appeared.

"Who is there?" he asked.

"A man and a woman."

"Have they been here before?'

"No."

"Do you know them?"

"No."

"Is the woman young?"

"Young and handsome."

"The man?"

"From sixty to sixty-five years of age."

"Where are they?"

"In the saloon."

Balsamo entered.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE EVOCATION

THE countess had completely concealed her face in a hood. As she had found time in passing to call at the family residence, she had assumed the dress of a citizen's wife. She had come in a hackney-coach with the marshal, who, even more timid that she, had donned a grey dress like that of a superior servant in a respectable household.

"Do you recognise me, count?" said Madame Dubarry.

"Perfectly, madame la comtesse."

Richelieu had remained in the background.

"Deign to be seated, madame, and you, also, monsieur."

"This is my steward," said the countess.

"You err, madame," said Balsamo, bowing; "the gentleman is the

Marshal Duke de Richelieu, whom I recognise easily, and who would be very ungrateful if he did not recognise me."

"How so?" asked the duke, quite confounded, as Tallemant des Reaux would say.

"My lord duke, a man owes a little gratitude, I think, to those who have saved his life.'

"Ah, ah! duke," said the countess, laughing; "do you hear, duke?"

"What! you have saved my life, count?" asked Richelieu, quite astounded.

"Yes, my lord; at Vienna, in the year 1725, when you were ambassador there."

"In 1725! But you were not born then, my dear sir."

Balsamo smiled.

"It seems to me that I was, my lord duke," said he, "since I met you, dying, or rather dead, upon a litter; you had just received a sword-thrust right through your body, and I poured three drops of my elixir upon the wound. There, hold!—the place where you are ruffling your Alençon lace—rather fine, I must say, for a steward."

"But," interrupted the marshal, "you are scarcely thirty-five years of age, count."

"There, duke," cried the countess, laughing heartily, "there, you are before the sorcerer; do you believe, now?"

"I am stupefied, countess. But at that period," continued the duke, addressing Balsamo, "you called yourself——"

"Oh! duke, we sorcerers change our name in each generation. Now, in 1725, names ending in *us*, *os*, or *as*, were the fashion; and I should not be surprised if, at that time, I had been seized with the whim of bartering my name for some Latin or Greek one. This being premised, I wait your commands, countess, and yours also, my lord."

"Count, the marshal and I have come to consult you."

"You do me too much honour, madame, especially if this idea arose naturally in your minds."

"Oh! in the most natural manner in the world, count; your prediction still haunts my thoughts, only I fear it will not be realised."

"Never doubt the dictates of science, madame."

"Oh! oh!" said Richelieu; "but our crown is a hazardous game, count. It is not here an affair of a wound which three drops of elixir can cure."

"No; but of a minister whom three words can ruin," replied Balsamo. "Well, have I guessed rightly? Tell me."

"Perfectly," said the trembling countess. "Tell me, in truth, what think you of all this, duke?"

"Oh! do not let such a trifle astonish you, madame," said Balsamo; "whoever sees Madame Dubarry and Richelieu uneasy, may guess the cause without magic."

"But," added the marshal, "if you can give us the remedy, I will perfectly adore you."

"The remedy for your complaint?"

"Yes; we are ill of the Choiseul."

"And you wish to be cured?"

"Yes, great magician."

"Count, you will not leave us in our embarrassment," said the countess; "your honour is engaged."

"My best services are at your command, madame; but I first wish to

know if the duke had not some definite plan formed when he came here?"

"I confess it, count. Really it is delightful to have a count for a sorcerer; we do not need to change our modes of speech."

Balsamo smiled.

"Come," said he, "let us be frank."

"'Pon honour, I wish for nothing else," replied the duke.

"You had some consultation to hold with me!"

"That is true."

"Ah, deceiver!" said the countess, "you never spoke of that to me."

"I could only speak of it to the count, and that in the most secret corner of his ear," replied the marshal.

"Why, duke?"

"Because you would have blushed, countess, to the whites of your eyes."

"Oh! tell it now, marshal, just to satisfy my curiosity. I am rouged, so you shall see nothing."

"Well!" said Richelieu, "this is what I thought. Take care, countess, I am going to take a most extravagant flight."

"Fly as high as you will, duke, I am prepared."

"Oh, but I fear you will beat me the moment you hear what I am about to say."

"You are not accustomed to be beaten, my lord duke," said Balsamo to the old marshal.

"Well," continued he, enchanted with the compliment, "here it is. Saving the displeasure of madame, his maj—how am I to express it?"

"How tiresome he is!" cried the countess.

"You will have it, then?"

"Yes, yes; a hundred times, yes!"

"Then I will venture. It is a sad thing to say, count, but his majesty is no longer amusable. The word is not of my originating, countess; it is Madame de Maintenon's."

"There is nothing in that which hurts me, duke," said Madame Dubarry.

"So much the better; then I shall feel at my ease. Well, the count, who discovers such precious elixirs, must——"

"Find one which shall restore to the king the faculty of being amused."

"Exactly."

"Oh! duke, that is mere child's play—the *a b c* of our craft. Any charlatan can furnish you with a philter——"

"Whose virtue," continued the duke, "would be put to the account of madame's merit."

"Duke!" exclaimed the countess.

"Oh! I knew you would be angry: but you would have it."

"My lord duke," replied Balsamo, "you were right. Look! the countess blushes. But just now we agreed that neither wounds nor love were to be treated of at present. A philter will not rid France of M. de Choiseul. In fact, if the king loved madame ten times more than he does, and that is impossible, M. de Choiseul would still retain the same influence over his mind which madame exerts over his heart."

"Very true," said the marshal; "but it was our only resource."

"You think so?"

"Dame! find another."

"Oh! that would be easy."

"Easy! do you hear, countess?—these sorcerers stop at nothing."

"Why should I stop, where the only thing necessary is simply to prove to the king that M. de Choiseul alone betrays him—that is to say, what the king would think betraying; for of course M. de Choiseul does not think he betrays him in acting as he does."

"And what does he do?"

"You know as well as I do, countess; he supports the parliament in their revolt against the royal authority."

"Certainly; but we must know by what means."

"By the means of agents who encourage them by promising them impunity."

"Who are the agents? We must know that."

"Do you believe, for example, that Madame de Grammont is gone for any other purpose than to sustain the ardent, and warm the timid?"

"Certainly; she left for no other reason," exclaimed the countess.

"Yes; but the king thinks it a simple exile."

"It is true."

"How can you prove to him that in this departure there is anything more than he supposes?"

"By accusing Madame de Grammont."

"Ah! if there were nothing necessary but to accuse her, count!" said the marshal.

"But, unfortunately, the accusation must be proved," added the countess.

"And if this accusation were proved, incontrovertibly proved, do you think M. de Choiseul would still be minister?"

"Certainly not," said the countess.

"Nothing is necessary then but to discover the treachery of M. de Choiseul," pursued Balsamo, with assurance; "and to display it clearly, precisely, and palpably before the eyes of his majesty."

The marshal threw himself back upon an arm-chair, and laughed loud and long.

"Charming!" he exclaimed; "he stops at nothing! Discover M. de Choiseul in the act of committing treason!—that is all, nothing more!"

Balsamo remained calm and unmoved, waiting until the marshal's mirth had subsided.

"Come," said Balsamo, "let us speak seriously, and recapitulate."

"So be it."

"Is not M. de Choiseul suspected of encouraging the revolt of the parliament?"

"Granted; but the proof?"

"Is not M. de Choiseul supposed," continued Balsamo, "to be attempting to bring about a war with England, in order that he may become indispensable?"

"It is so believed; but the proof?"

"Is not M. de Choiseul the declared enemy of the countess, and does he not seek, by all possible means, to drag her from the throne I promised her?"

"Ah! all this is very true," said the countess; "but once more I repeat, it must be proved. Oh! that I could prove it!"

"What is necessary for that? A mere trifle."

The marshal gave a low whistle.

"Yes, a mere trifle!" said he, sarcastically.

"A confidential letter, for example," said Balsamo.

"Yes; that is all—a mere nothing."

"A letter from Madame de Grammont would do, would it not, marshal?" continued the count.

"Sorcerer, my good sorcerer, find me such a one!" cried Madame Dubarry. "I have been trying for five years; I have spent a hundred thousand livres per annum, and have never succeeded."

"Because you never applied to me, madame," said Balsamo.

"How so?" said the countess.

"Without doubt, if you had applied to me, I could have assisted you."

"Could you? Count, is it yet too late?"

The count smiled.

"It is never too late," said he.

"Oh, my dear count!" said Madame Dubarry, clasping her hands.

"You want a letter, then?"

"Yes."

"From Madame de Grammont?"

"If it is possible."

"Which shall compromise M. de Choiseul on the three points which I have mentioned?"

"I would give—one of my eyes to see it."

"Oh! countess, that would be too dear; inasmuch as this letter—I will give it you for nothing."

And Balsamo drew a folded paper from his pocket.

"What is that?" asked the countess, devouring the paper with her eyes.

"Yes, what is that?" repeated the duke.

"The letter you wished for."

And the count, amidst the most profound silence, read the letter, with which our readers are already acquainted, to his two astonished auditors.

As he read, the countess opened her eyes to their utmost width, and began to lose countenance.

"It is a forgery," said Richelieu, when the letter had been read. "Diable! we must take care."

"Monsieur, it is the simple and literal copy of a letter from the Duchess de Grammont, which a courier, despatched this morning from Rouen, is now carrying to the Duke de Choiseul at Versailles."

"Oh, heavens!" cried the marshal, "do you speak truly, Count Balsamo?"

"I always speak the truth, marshal."

"The duchess has written such a letter?"

"Yes, marshal."

"She could not be so imprudent."

"It is incredible, I confess; but so it is."

The old duke looked at the countess, who had not the power to utter a single word.

"Well," said she, at last, "I am like the duke, I can scarcely believe—excuse me, count—that Madame de Grammont, a woman of sense, should compromise her own position, and that of her brother, by a letter so strongly expressed. Besides, to know of such a letter, one must have read it——"

"And then," said the marshal, quickly, "if the count had read this letter, he would have kept it; it is a precious treasure."

Balsamo gently shook his head.

"Oh," said he, "such a plan might suit those who have to break open letters in order to ascertain their contents—but not those who, like myself, can read through the envelopes. Fie upon you! Besides, what interest could I have in ruining M. de Choiseul and Madame de Grammont? You come to consult me, as friends, I presume, and I answer you in the same

manner. You wish me to render you a service, I do so. You do not mean I suppose, to ask me the price of my consultation, as you would the fortune-tellers of the Quai de la Ferraille?"

"Oh, count!" said Madame Dubarry.

"Well, I give you this advice, and you seem not to comprehend it. You express a wish to overthrow M. de Choiseul, and you seek the means. I tell you one. You approve of it, I put it into your hands, and—you do not believe it."

"Because—because—count—I——"

"The letter exists, I tell you, for I have the copy."

"But who told you of its existence, count?" cried Richelieu.

"Ah! that is a great word—who told me! You wish to know, in one moment, as much as I know; I, the worker, the sage, the adept who has lived three thousand seven hundred years."

"Oh! oh!" said Richelieu, discouraged; "you are going to alter the good opinion I had formed of you, count."

"I do not ask you to believe me, my lord duke, it is not I who brought you hither from the chase."

"Duke, he is right," said the countess. "Monsieur de Balsamo, pray do not be hasty."

"He who has time never gets impatient, madame."

"Will you be so good as to add another favour to those you have already conferred upon me, and tell me how these secrets are revealed to you."

"I shall not hesitate, madame," said Balsamo, speaking as if he was searching for each word separately; "the revelation is made to me by a voice."

"By a voice!" cried the duke and the countess, simultaneously; "a voice tells you all?"

"Everything I wish to know."

"Was it a voice that told you what Madame de Grammont has written to her brother?"

"I repeat, madame, it is a voice which tells me."

"Miraculous!"

"Why, do you not believe it?"

"Well, no, count," said the duke; "how do you imagine I can believe such things?"

"Would you believe it if I told you what the courier who carries the letter to M. de Choiseul is doing at this moment?"

"Dame!" exclaimed the countess.

"I would believe it," cried the duke, "if I heard the voice; but messieurs the necromancers and magicians have the sole privilege of seeing and hearing the supernatural."

Balsamo looked at Richelieu with a singular expression, which made a shudder pass through the veins of the countess, and even sent a slight chill to the heart of the selfish sceptic called the Duke de Richelieu.

"Yes," said he, after a long silence, "I alone see and hear supernatural objects and sounds, but when I am in the society of people of rank—of your talent, duke, and of your beauty, countess, I display my treasures and share them. Would you wish greatly to hear the mysterious voice which speaks to me."

"Yes," said the duke, clenching his hands tightly that he might not tremble.

"Yes," stammered the countess, trembling.

"Well, duke—well, countess, you shall hear it. What language shall it speak?"

"French, if you please," said the countess. "I know no other; any other would frighten me."

"And you, duke!"

"As madame said, French; for then I shall be able to repeat what the devil says, and to discover if he speaks the language of my friend, M. de Voltaire, correctly."

Balsamo, his head drooping on his breast, crossed over to the door leading into the saloon, which opened, as we are aware, on the stairs.

"Permit me," said he, "to conceal you here, in order not to expose you to the risk of discovery."

The countess turned pale, approached the duke, and took his arm.

Balsamo, almost touching the door leading to the stairs, made a step towards that part of the house in which Lorenza was, and pronounced in a low voice the following words, in the Arabic tongue, which we translate:

"My friend—do you hear me? If so, pull the cord of the bell twice."

Balsamo waited to see the effect of these words, and looked at the duke and countess, who opened their eyes and ears, and the more so that they could not understand what the count said.

The bell sounded twice distinctly.

The countess started from her sofa, and the duke wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Since you hear me," continued Balsamo in the same language, "press the marble button which forms the right eye of the sculptured figure on the chimneypiece; the back will open; pass out by this opening, cross my room, descend the stairs, and enter the apartment adjoining the one in which I am."

Immediately a faint noise, like a scarcely audible breath, told Balsamo that his order had been understood and obeyed.

"What language is that?" asked the duke, pretending assurance. "The cabalistic language?"

"Yes, duke; the language used for the summoning of spirits."

"You said we should understand it."

"What the voice said, but not what I say."

"Has the devil appeared yet?"

"Who spoke of the devil, duke?"

"Whom do you evoke but the devil?"

"Every superior spirit, every supernatural being, can be evoked."

"And the superior spirit, the supernatural being——?"

Balsamo extended his hand towards the tapestry which closed the door of the next apartment.

"Is in direct communication with me, my lord."

"I am afraid," said the countess; "are you, duke?"

"Faith, countess, I confess to you that I would almost as soon be at Mahon or at Philipsbourg."

"Madame la comtesse, and you, my lord duke, listen, since you wish to hear," said Balsamo, severely, and he turned towards the door.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE VOICE.

THERE was a moment of solemn silence, then Balsamo asked in French:

"Are you there?"

"I am," replied a clear, silvery voice, which, penetrating through the hangings and the doors, seemed to those present rather like a metallic sound than a human voice.

"*Peste!* it is becoming interesting," said the duke; "and all without torches, magic, or Bengal lights."

"It is fearful," whispered the countess.

"Listen attentively to my questions," continued Balsamo.

"I listen with my whole being."

"First tell me, how many persons are with me at this moment?"

"Two."

"Of what sex?"

"A man and a woman."

"Read the man's name in my thoughts."

"The Duke de Richelieu."

"And the woman's?"

"Madame the Countess Dubarry."

"Ha!" said the duke, "this is becoming serious."

"I never saw anything like it," murmured the trembling countess.

"Good!" said Balsamo; "now read the first sentence of the letter I hold in my hand."

The voice obeyed.

The duke and the countess looked at each other with astonishment, bordering upon admiration.

"What has become of the letter I wrote at your dictation?"

"It is hastening on."

"In which direction?"

"Towards the East."

"Is it far?"

"Yes, very far."

"Who is carrying it?"

"A man dressed in a green vest, leathern cap, and large boots."

"On foot or on horseback?"

"On horseback."

"What kind of a horse?"

"A piebald horse."

"Where do you see him?"

There was a moment's silence.

"Look," said Balsamo, imperatively.

"On a wide road, planted with trees."

"But on which road?"

"I do not know; all the roads are alike."

"What! does nothing indicate what road it is—no post nor inscription?"

"Stay! stay! A carriage is passing near the man on horseback; it crosses his course, coming towards me."

"What kind of carriage?"

"A heavy carriage, full of abbés and soldiers."
"A stage coach," said Richelieu.
"Is there no inscription upon the carriage?" asked Balsamo.
"Yes," said the voice.
"Read it."
"Versailles is written in yellow letters upon the carriage, but the word is nearly effaced."
"Leave the carriage and follow the courier."
"I do not see him now."
"Why do you not see him?"
"Because the road turns."
"Turn the corner, and follow him."
"Oh! he gallops as quickly as his horse can fly; he looks at his watch."
"What do you see in front of the horse?"
"A long avenue, splendid buildings, a large town."
"Follow him still."
"I follow."
"Well?"
"The courier redoubles his blows, the animal is bathed in perspiration: its iron-shod hoofs strike the pavement so loudly that all the passers-by look round. Ah! the courier dashes into a long street which descends. He turns to the right. He slackens his horse's speed. He stops at the door of a large hotel."
"Now you must follow him attentively, do you hear?"
The voice heaved a sigh.
"You are tired. I understand."
"Oh! crushed with weariness."
"Cease to be fatigued, I will it."
"Ah! Thanks."
"Are you still fatigued?"
"No."
"Do you still see the courier?"
"Yes, yes; he ascends a large stone staircase. He is preceded by a valet in blue and gold livery. He crosses large saloons full of splendid gilt ornaments. He stops at a small lighted closet. The valet opens the door and retires."
"What do you see?"
"The courier bows."
"To whom does he bow?"
"He bows to a man seated at a desk, with his back towards the door."
"How is the man dressed?"
"Oh, in full dress, as if he were going to a ball."
"Has he any decoration?"
"He wears a broad blue ribbon crosswise on his breast."
"His face?"
"I cannot see it. Ah!——"
"What?"
"He turns."
"What sort of features has he?"
"A keen glance, irregular features, beautiful teeth."
"What age?"
"From fifty-five to fifty-eight years of age."
"The duke!" whispered the countess to the marshal; "it is the duke!"

The marshal made a sign as if to say, "Yes, it is he; but listen."

"Well?" asked Balsamo.

"The courier gives a letter to the man with the blue ribbon——"

"You may say to the duke; he is a duke."

"The courier," repeated the obedient voice, "takes a letter from the leathern bag behind him, and gives it to the duke. The duke breaks the seal, and reads it attentively."

"Well?"

"He takes a pen and a sheet of paper and writes."

"He writes!" said Richelieu. "Diable! if we could only know what he writes."

"Tell me what he writes," commanded Balsamo.

"I cannot."

"Because you are too far away. Enter the room. Are you there?"

"Yes."

"Look over his shoulder."

"I am doing so."

"Now read."

"The writing is bad, small, irregular."

"Read it; I will it."

The countess and Richelieu held their breaths.

"Read," repeated Balsamo, more imperatively still.

"My sister," said the voice, trembling and hesitating.

"It is the reply," said the duchess and Richelieu in the same breath.

"My sister," continued the voice, "do not be uneasy. The crisis took place, it is true; it was a dangerous one; that is true also; but it is over. I am anxiously awaiting to-morrow, for to-morrow it will be my turn to act on the offensive, and everything leads me to expect a decisive triumph.

"The parliament of Rouen, Milord X—, the petards, are all satisfactory.

"To-morrow, after my interview with the king, I shall add a *post scriptum* to my letter, and send it you by the same courier."

Balsamo, with his left hand extended, seemed to drag each word painfully from the voice, while with the right hand he hastily took down those lines which M. de Choiseul was at the same time writing in his closet at Versailles.

"Is that all?" asked Balsamo.

"That is all."

"What is the duke doing now?"

"He folds the paper on which he has just written, and puts it into a small portfolio, which he takes from the pocket in the left side of his coat."

"You hear," said Balsamo, to the almost stupefied countess.—"Well?"

"Then he sends away the courier."

"What does he say to him?"

"I only heard the end of the sentence."

"What was it?"

"'At one o'clock at the postern gate of Trianon.' The courier bows and retires."

"Yes," said Richelieu, "he makes an appointment to meet the courier when his audience is over, as he says in his letter."

Balsamo made a sign with his hand to command silence.

"What is the duke doing now?" he asked.

'He rises. He holds the letter he has received in his hand. He goes straight towards his bed, enters the passage between it and the wall, and

presses a spring which opens an iron box.—He throws the letter into the box and closes it."

"Oh!" cried the countess and the duke, turning pale, "this is in truth magical."

"Do you know now what you wish to know, madame?" asked Balsamo.

"Count," said Madame Dubarry, approaching him with terror, "you have rendered me a service which I would pay with ten years of my life, or rather, which I can never pay. Ask what you wish."

"Oh! madame, you know we have already an account."

"Speak; say what you wish."

"The time has not yet come."

"Well, when it comes, if it were a million——"

Balsamo smiled.

"Oh! countess," exclaimed the marshal, "you should rather ask the count for a million. Cannot a man who knows what he knows, and who sees what he sees, discover diamonds and gold in the bosom of the earth as easily as he discovers the thoughts in the heart of man?"

"Then, count," said the countess, "I bow myself before you in my weakness."

"No, countess; one day you will acquit your debt towards me. I shall give you the opportunity."

"Count," said Richelieu to Balsamo, "I am conquered—crushed. I believe."

"As Saint Thomas believed, duke. I do not call that believing, but seeing."

"Call it what you will, I will make the amende honorable; and, in future, if I am asked about sorcerers, I shall know what to say."

Balsamo smiled.

"Madame," said he to the countess, "will you permit me to do one thing now?"

"Speak."

"My spirit is wearied. Let me restore it to liberty by a magic formula."

"Do so, sir."

"Lorenza," said Balsamo, in Arabic, "thanks, I love you; return to your apartment by the same way you came, and wait for me. Go, my beloved."

"I am very tired," replied in Italian the voice, softer still than even during the evocation. "Hasten, Acharat."

"I come," and the footsteps died away in the distance with the same rustling noise with which they had approached.

Then Balsamo, after a few moments' interval, during which he convinced himself of Lorenza's departure, bowed profoundly but with majestic dignity to his visitors, who returned to their fiacre more like intoxicated persons than human beings gifted with reason, so much were they staggered and absorbed by the crowd of tumultuous ideas which assailed them.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

DISGRACE.

THE next morning, as the great clock of Versailles struck eleven, King Louis XV. issued from his apartment, and crossing the adjoining gallery, called in a loud and stern voice:

"Monsieur de la Vrilliere!"

The king was pale, and seemed agitated. The more he endeavoured to hide his emotion, the more evident it became from the embarrassment of his looks, and the rigid tension of his usually impassible features.

A death-like stillness pervaded the long ranks of courtiers, amongst whom the Duke de Richelieu and Count Jean Dubarry might be seen, both seemingly calm, and affecting indifference or ignorance as to what was going on.

The Duke de la Vrilliere approached, and took a *lettre-de-cachet* from the king's hand.

"Is the Duke de Choiseul at Versailles?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire. He returned from Paris yesterday, at two o'clock in the afternoon."

"Is he in his hotel, or in the château?"

"In the château, sire."

"Carry this order to him, duke," said the king.

A shudder ran through the whole file of spectators, who bent down, whispering, like ears of corn under the blast of a tornado.

The king, frowning, as if he wished to add terror to this scene, haughtily entered his closet, followed by the captain of the guard and the commandant of the Light Horse.

All eyes followed M. de la Vrilliere, who slowly crossed the court-yard, and entered M. de Choiseul's apartments, rather uneasy at the commission with which he was charged.

During this time, loud and eager conversations, some threatening, some timid, burst forth on all sides around the old marshal, who pretended to be even more surprised than the others, but who, thanks to his cunning smile, duped no one.

M. de la Vrilliere returned, and was immediately surrounded.

"Well?" cried every one.

"Well? It was an order of banishment."

"Of banishment?"

"Yes; in due form."

"Then you have read it, duke?"

"I have."

"Positively?"

"Judge for yourselves."

And the Duke de la Vrilliere repeated the following lines, which he had treasured up with the retentive memory which marks the true courtier:

"MY COUSIN,—

"The displeasure which your conduct causes me obliges me to exile you to Chanteloup, whither you must repair in four-and-twenty hours from this time. I should have sent you further, had it not been for the particular esteem I feel for Madame de Choiseul, whose health is exceedingly interesting to me. Take care that your conduct does not force me to proceed to ulterior measures."

A long murmur ran through the group which surrounded M. de la Vrilliere.

"And what did he reply to you, M. de St. Florentin?" asked Richelieu, affecting not to give to the duke either his new name or his new title.

"He replied, 'Duke, I feel convinced of the great pleasure you feel in being the bearer of this letter.'"

"That was harsh, my poor duke," said Jean.

"What could you expect, count? A man does not receive such a tile thrown upon his head without crying out a little."

"Do you know what he will do?" asked Richelieu.

"Most probably obey."

"Hum!" said the marshal.

"Here is the duke coming!" said Jean, who stood as sentinel at the window.

"Coming here?" exclaimed the Duke de la Vrilliere.

"I told you so, M. de St. Florentin."

"He is crossing the court-yard," continued Jean.

"Alone?"

"Quite alone; his portfolio under his arm."

"Oh! good heavens!" said Richelieu, "if yesterday's scene should be repeated!"

"Do not speak of it; I shudder at the thought," replied Jean.

He had scarcely spoken, when the Duke de Choiseul appeared at the entrance of the gallery with head erect and confident look, alarming his enemies, or those who would declare themselves such on his disgrace, by his calm and piercing glance.

As no one expected this step after what had happened, no one opposed his progress.

"Are you sure you read correctly, duke?" asked Jean.

"Parbleu!"

"And he returns after such a letter as you nave described?"

"Upon my honour, I cannot understand it."

"The king will send him to the Bastille."

"That would cause a fearful commotion."

"I should almost pity him."

"Look! he is going to the king! It is incredible."

In fact, without paying attention to the show of resistance which the astounded usher offered, M. de Choiseul entered the king's closet. Louis, on seeing him, uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

The duke held his lettre-de-cachet in his hand, and showed it to the king almost smilingly.

"Sire," said he, "as your majesty had the goodness to forewarn me yesterday, I have indeed received a letter to-day."

"Yes, sir," replied the king.

"And as your majesty had the goodness yesterday to tell me not to look upon any letter as serious which was not ratified by the express words of the king, I have come to request an explanation."

"It will be very short, my lord duke," replied the king. "To-day, the letter is valid."

"Valid?" said the duke. "So offensive a letter to so devoted a servant?"

"A devoted servant, sir, does not make his master play a ridiculous part."

"Sire," replied the minister, haughtily, "I was born near the throne, that I might comprehend its majesty."

"Sir," replied the king, in a severe voice, "I will not keep you in suspense. Yesterday evening you received a courier from Madame de Grammont in your closet at Versailles."

"It is true, sire."

"He brought you a letter."

"Are a brother and sister forbidden to correspond?"

"Wait a moment, if you please. I know the contents of that letter."

"Oh, sire!"

"Here it is. I took the trouble to copy it with my own hand."

And the king handed to the duke an exact copy of the letter he had received.

"Sire!"

"Do not deny it, duke; you placed the letter in an iron coffer standing at your bedside."

The duke became pale as a spectre.

"That is not all," continued the king, pitilessly; "you have replied to Madame de Grammont's letter. I know the contents of that letter also. It is there in your portfolio, and only wants the *post scriptum*, which you are to add when you leave me. You see I am well informed, am I not?"

The duke wiped his forehead, on which the large drops of perspiration were standing, bowed without uttering a word, and left the closet, tottering as if he had been struck with apoplexy. Had it not been for the fresh air which fanned his face, he must have fallen.

But he was a man of strong will. When he reached the gallery he had regained his strength, and with erect forehead passed the hedge of courtiers, and entered his apartments in order to burn and lock up several papers. A quarter of an hour afterwards, he left the château in his carriage.

M. de Choiseul's disgrace was a thunderbolt which set all France in flames.

The parliament, sustained in reality by the tolerance of the minister, proclaimed that the state had lost its firmest pillar. The nobility supported him as being one of themselves. The clergy felt themselves soothed by this man, whose personal dignity, often carried even to the extent of pride, gave almost an appearance of sanctity to his ministerial functions.

The encyclopedist or the philosophical party, who were very numerous, and also very strong, because they were reinforced by all the enlightened, clever, and cavilling spirits of the age, cried out loudly when the government was taken from the hands of a minister who admired Voltaire, pensioned the encyclopedia, and preserved, by developing them in a more useful manner, the traditions of Madame de Pompadour, the female Mecænas of the writers of the *Mercure* and of philosophy in general.

The people had far better grounds for complaint than any of the other malcontents. They also complained, but without reasoning, and, as they always do, they hit the truth and laid bare the bleeding wound.

M. de Choiseul, absolutely speaking, was a bad minister and a bad citizen; but relatively he was a paragon of virtue, of morality, and of patriotism. When the people, dying of hunger in the fields, heard of his majesty's prodigality and of Madame Dubarry's ruinous whims, when open warnings were sent him, such as "*L'homme aux quarante écus*," or advices like "*Le Contrat Social*," and secret revelations like the "*Nouvelles à la main*," and the "*Idées singulières d'un bon citoyen*," they were terrified at the prospect of falling back into the impure hands of the favourite, *less respectable than a collier's wife*, as Bauveau said, and into the hands of the favourite's favourites; and wearied with so much suffering, they were alarmed to behold the future looking even blacker than the past.

It was not that the people, who had strong antipathies, had also strong sympathies. They did not like the parliament, because they who ought to have been their natural protectors had always abandoned them for idle inquiries, questions of precedence, or selfish interests; and because, dazzled by the borrowed light of the royal omnipotence, they imagined

themselves something like an aristocracy, occupying an intermediate place between the nobility and the people.

They disliked the nobility from instinct, and from memory. They feared the sword as much as they hated the church. Their position could not therefore be affected by the disgrace of M. de Choiseul, but they heard the complaints of the nobility, of the clergy, of the parliament, and this noise joined to their own murmurs made an uproar which intoxicated them.

The consequence of these feelings was regret, and a sort of a *quasi* popularity for the name of Choiseul.

All Paris—the word in this case can be justified by the facts—accompanied the exile on his way to Chanteloup as far as the town gates.

The people lined the road which the carriage was to take, while the members of the parliament and the court, who could not be received by the duke, stationed themselves in their carriages in front of the crowd of people, that they might salute him as he passed, and bid him adieu.

The procession was the densest at the Barrière d'Enfer, which is on the road to Touraine, at which place there was such a conflux of foot passengers, horsemen, and carriages, that the traffic was interrupted for several hours.

When the duke had crossed the barrier, he found himself escorted by more than a hundred carriages, which formed a sort of triumphal procession around him.

Acclamations and sighs followed him on all sides, but he had too much sense and penetration not to know that all this noise was not so much occasioned by regret for him personally, as by the fear of those unknown people who were to rise upon his ruin.

A short way from the barrier a post-chaise, galloping along the crowded road, met the procession, and had it not been for the skill of the postilion, the horses, white with foam and dust, would have dashed against M. de Choiseul's equipage.

A head bent forward out of the carriage window, and M. de Choiseul leaned out also from his.

M. d'Aiguillon bowed profoundly to the fallen minister whose heritage he had come to canvass. M. de Choiseul threw himself back in the carriage; a single second had sufficed to wither the laurels which had crowned his disgrace.

But at the same moment, as a compensation no doubt, a carriage drawn by eight horses and bearing the royal arms of France, which was seen advancing along the cross road from Sèvres to St. Cloud, and which, whether by accident, or on account of the crowd, did not turn into the high road, also crossed before M. de Choiseul's carriage. The dauphiness, with her lady of honour, Madame de Noailles, was on the back seat of the carriage, on the front was Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney. M. de Choiseul, crimson with exultation and joy, bent forward out of the door, and bowed profoundly.

"Adieu, madame," said he, in a low voice.

"*Au revoir*, M. de Choiseul," replied the dauphiness, with an imperial smile, and a majestic contempt of all etiquette.

"Long live M. de Choiseul!" cried a voice, enthusiastically, after the dauphiness had spoken.

At the sound of the voice, Mademoiselle Andrée turned round quickly.

"Make way! make way!" cried her highness's grooms, forcing Gilbert, pale as death, and pressing forward in his eagerness, to range himself with the other people on the road.

It was indeed our hero, who, in his philosophical enthusiasm, had cried out, "Long live M. de Choiseul!"

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE DUKE D'AIGUILLON.

WHILE melancholy visages and red eyes were the order of the day on the road from Paris to Chanteloup, Luciennes was radiant with blooming faces and charming smiles.

It was because at Luciennes was enthroned, not a mere mortal, although the most beautiful and most adorable of mortals, as the poets and courtiers declared, but the real divinity which governed France.

The evening after M. de Choiseul's disgrace, therefore, the road leading to Luciennes was thronged with the same carriages which, in the morning, had rolled after the exiled minister. There were, besides, the partisans of the chancellor, and the votaries of corruption and self-interest, and altogether they made an imposing procession.

But Madame Dubarry had her police, and Jean knew, to a baron, the names of those who had strewn the last flowers over the expiring Choiseuls. He gave a list of these names to the countess, and they were pitilessly excluded, while the courage of the others in braving public opinion was rewarded by the protecting smile and the complete view of the goddess of the day. What joy and what congratulations echoed on all sides! Pressings of the hand, little smothered laughs, and enthusiastic applause, seemed to have become the habitual language of the inhabitants of Luciennes.

After the great throng of carriages, and the general crowd, followed the private receptions Richelieu, the secret and modest hero, indeed, but yet the real hero of the day, saw the crowd of visitors and petitioners pass away, and remained the last in the countess's boudoir.

"It must be confessed," said the countess, "that the Count Balsamo, or De Fenix, which ever name you give him, marshal, is one of the first men of the age. It would be a thousand pities if such sorcerers were still burnt."

"Certainly, countess, he is a great man," replied Richelieu.

"And a very handsome man, too; I have taken quite a fancy for him, duke."

"You will make me jealous," said Richelieu laughing, and eager besides to direct the conversation to a more positive and serious subject. "The Count de Fenix would make a dreadful minister of police."

"I was thinking of that," replied the countess; "only it is impossible."

"Why, countess?"

"Because he would render colleagues impossible."

"How so?"

"Knowing everything—seeing into their hand——"

Richelieu blushed beneath his rouge.

"Countess," replied he, "if he were my colleague, I would wish him to see into mine always, and communicate the cards to you; for you would ever see the knave of hearts on his knees before the queen, and prostrate at the feet of the king."

"Your wit puts us all to the blush, my dear duke," replied the countess.

"But let us talk a little of our ministry. I think you mentioned that you warned your nephew D'Aiguillon of what would take place."

"He has arrived, madame, and with what Roman augurs would have called the best conjunction of omens possible: his carriage met Choiseul's leaving Paris."

"That is indeed a favourable omen," said the countess. "Then he is coming here?"

"Madame, I thought that if M. d'Aiguillon was seen at Luciennes at such a time, it would give rise to unpleasant comment; I begged him, therefore, to remain in the village, until I should send for him according to your orders."

"Send for him immediately, then, marshal, for we are alone, or very nearly so."

"The more willingly that we quite understand each other; do we not, countess?"

"Certainly, duke. You prefer war to finance, do you not? or do you wish for the marine?"

"I prefer war, madame; I can be of most service in that department."

"True; I will speak of it to the king. You have no antipathies?"

"For whom?"

"For any colleagues his majesty might present to you."

"I am the least difficult man in the world to live with, countess; but allow me to send for my nephew, since you are good enough to grant him the favour of an audience."

Richelieu approached the window and looked into the courtyard, now illuminated by the last rays of the setting sun. He made a sign to one of his footmen, who was keeping his eye fixed upon the window, and who darted off as soon as he received the signal.

Lights were now brought in.

Ten minutes after the footman had disappeared, a carriage rolled into the courtyard. The countess turned quickly towards the window.

Richelieu saw the movement, which seemed to him an excellent prognostic for M. d'Aiguillon's affairs, and consequently for his own.

"She likes the uncle," said he to himself, "and she is in a fair way to like the nephew. We shall be masters here."

While he was feasting on these chimerical visions, a slight noise was heard at the door, and the confidential valet-de-chambre, throwing it open, announced the Duke d'Aiguillon.

He was an extremely handsome and graceful nobleman, richly, and at the same time elegantly and tastefully, dressed. M. d'Aiguillon had passed his earliest prime, but he was one of those men who, whether judged by their looks or minds, seem young until old age renders them infirm.

The cares of government had traced no wrinkles on his brow; they had only enlarged the natural fold which seems to be the birthplace of great thoughts both in statesmen and in poets. His air and carriage were lofty and commanding, and his handsome features wore an expression at once of intelligence and melancholy, as if he knew that the hatred of ten millions of men weighed upon his head, but at the same time wished to prove that the weight was not beyond his strength.

M. d'Aiguillon had the most beautiful hands in the world; they looked white and delicate, even when buried in the softest folds of lace. A well-turned leg was prized very highly at that period, and the duke's was a model of manly elegance and aristocratic form. He combined the suavity of the poet with the nobility of the lord and the suppleness and ease of the dash-

ing guardsman. He was thus a beau ideal for the countess in the three several qualities which the instinct of this beautiful sensualist taught her to love.

By a remarkable coincidence, or rather by a chain of circumstances skilfully contrived by M. d'Aiguillon, these two objects of public animadversion, the favourite and the courtier, had, with all their mutual advantages, never yet met each other face to face at court.

For the last three years M. d'Aiguillon had managed to be very busy either in Brittany or in his closet, and had not once shown himself at court, knowing well that a favourable or unfavourable crisis must soon take place. In the first case, it would be better to be comparatively unknown ; in the second, to disappear without leaving any trace behind, and thus be able easily to emerge from the gulf under new auspices, and in a new character.

Another motive influenced his calculations—a motive which is the mainspring of romance, but which nevertheless was the most powerful of all.

Before Madame Dubarry was a countess, and every evening touched the crown of France with her lips, she had been a lovely, smiling, and adored creature--she had been loved, a happiness she could no longer hope for, since she was feared.

Amongst all the young, rich, powerful, and handsome men who had paid court to Jeanne Vaubernier, amongst all the rhymers who had coupled her in their verses with the epithets of angel and divinity, the Duke d'Aiguillon had formerly figured in the first rank ; but whether it was that the duke was not sufficiently ardent, or whether Mademoiselle Lange was not so easily pleased as her detractors pretended, or lastly, whether the sudden attachment of the king had separated two hearts ready to unite, is not known, but the fact remains that M. d'Aiguillon got his verses, acrostics, bouquets, and perfumes returned, and Mademoiselle Lange closed her door in the Rue des Petits Champs against him. The duke hastened to Brittany, suppressing his sighs ; Mademoiselle Lange wafted all hers towards Versailles, to the Baron de Gonesse, that is, the King of France.

D'Aiguillon's sudden disappearance had troubled Madame Dubarry very little, for she feared the remembrances of the past ; but when subsequently she saw the silent attitude of her former admirer, she felt at first perplexed, then astonished, and, being in a good position for judging of men, she ended by thinking him a man of profound tact and discretion.

For the countess this was a great distinction, but it was not all, and the moment was perhaps come when she might think D'Aiguillon a man of heart.

We have seen that the marshal, in all his conversations with Madame Dubarry, had never touched upon the subject of his nephew's acquaintance with Mademoiselle Lange. This silence, from a man accustomed, as the old duke was, to say the most difficult things in the world, had much surprised and even alarmed the countess. She, therefore, impatiently awaited M. d'Aiguillon's arrival, to know how to conduct herself, and to ascertain whether the marshal had been discreet or merely ignorant.

The duke entered, respectful, but at the same time easy, and sufficiently master of himself to draw the distinction in his salutation between the reigning sultana and the court lady. By this discriminating tact he instantly gained a protectress quite disposed to find good perfect, and perfection wonderful.

M. d'Aiguillon then took his uncle's hand, and the latter, advancing towards the countess, said in his most insinuating voice :

"The Duke d'Aiguillon, madame. It is not so much my nephew as one of your most ardent servants whom I have the honour to present to you."

The countess glanced at the duke as the marshal spoke, and looked at him like a woman, that is to say, with eyes which nothing can escape. But she saw only two heads bowing respectfully before her, and two faces erect, serene, and calm after the salutation was over.

"I know, marshal, that you love the duke," said the countess. "You are my friend. I shall request M. d'Aiguillon, therefore, in deference to his uncle, to imitate him in all that will be agreeable to me."

"That is the conduct I had traced out beforehand for myself, madame," said D'Aiguillon, with another bow.

"You have suffered much in Britanny?" asked the countess.

"Yes, madame, and it is not yet over," replied D'Aiguillon.

"I believe it is, sir; besides, there is M. de Richelieu, who will be a powerful assistance to you."

D'Aiguillon looked at Richelieu as if surprised.

"Ah," said the countess, "I see that the marshal has not yet had time to have any conversation with you. That is very natural, as you have just arrived from a journey. Well, you must have a thousand things to say to each other, and I shall therefore leave you, marshal, for the present. My lord duke, pray consider yourself at home here."

So saying, the countess retired; but she did not proceed far. Behind the boudoir there opened a large closet filled with all sorts of fantastic baubles with which the king was very fond of amusing himself when he came to Luciennes. He preferred this closet to the boudoir, because in it one could hear all that was said in the next room. Madame Dubarry, therefore, was certain to hear the whole conversation between the duke and his nephew, and she calculated upon forming from it a correct and irrevocable opinion of the latter.

But the duke was not duped; he knew most of the secrets of every royal and ministerial residence. To listen when people were speaking of him was one of his means; to speak while others were overhearing him was one of his ruses.

He determined, therefore, still joyous at the reception which D'Aiguillon had met with, to proceed in the same vein, and to reveal to the favourite, under cover of her supposed absence, such a plan of secret happiness and of lofty power complicated with intrigues, as would present a double bait too powerful for a pretty woman, and above all for a court lady, to resist.

He desired the duke to be seated, and commenced:

"You see, duke, I am installed here."

"Yes, sir, I see it."

"I have had the good fortune to gain the favour of this charming woman, who is looked upon as a queen here, and who is one in reality."

D'Aiguillon bowed.

"I must tell you, duke," continued Richelieu, "what I could not say in the open street—that Madame Dubarry has promised me a portfolio!"

"Ah!" said D'Aiguillon, "that is only your desert, sir."

"I do not know if I deserve it or not, but I am to have it—rather late in the day, it is true. Then, situated as I shall be, I shall endeavour to advance your interests, D'Aiguillon."

"Thank you, my lord duke; you are a kind relative, and have often proved it."

"You have nothing in view, D'Aiguillon?"

"Absolutely nothing, except to escape being degraded from my title of duke and peer, as the parliament insist upon my being."

"Have you supporters anywhere?"

"Not one."

"You would have fallen, then, had it not been for the present circumstances?"

"I should have bit the dust, my lord duke."

"Ah! you speak like a philosopher. Diable! that is the reason I am so harsh, my poor D'Aiguillon, and address you more like a minister than an uncle."

"My uncle, your goodness penetrates me with gratitude."

"When I sent for you in such a hurry, you may be certain it was because I wished you to play an important part here. Let me see; have you reflected on the part M. de Choiseul played for ten years?"

"Yes; certainly his was an enviable position."

"Enviable! Yes, enviable, when along with Madame de Pompadour he governed the king, and exiled the Jesuits; but very sad when, having quarrelled with Madame Dubarry, who is worth a hundred Pompadours, he was dismissed from office in four and twenty hours. You do not reply."

"I am listening, sir, and am endeavouring to discover your meaning."

"You like M. de Choiseul's first part best, do you not?"

"Certainly."

"Well, my dear duke, I have decided upon playing this part."

D'Aiguillon turned abruptly towards his uncle:

"Do you speak seriously?" said he.

"Yes. Why not?"

"You intend to be a candidate for Madame Dubarry's favour?"

"Ah! diable! you proceed too fast. But I see you understand me. Yes, Choiseul was very lucky; he governed the king, and governed his favourite also. It is said he was attached to Madame de Pompadour—in fact, why not? Well, no, I cannot act the lover; your cold smile tells me plainly so! You, with your young eyes, look compassionately at my furrowed brow, my bending knees, and my withered hands, which were once so beautiful. In place of saying, when I was speaking of Choiseul's part, that I would play it, I should have said we will play it."

"Uncle!"

"No, she cannot love me, I know it; nevertheless—I may confess it to you without fear, for she will never learn it—I could have loved this woman beyond everything—but——"

D'Aiguillon frowned. "But——" said he.

"I have a splendid project," continued the marshal. "This part, which my age renders impossible for me, I will divide into two."

"Ha!" said D'Aiguillon.

"Some one of my family," continued Richelieu, "will love Madame Dubarry. "Parbleu! a glorious chance—such an accomplished woman!"

And Richelieu, in saying these words, raised his voice.

"You know it cannot be Fronsac. A degenerate wretch, a fool, a coward, a rogue, a gambler—duke, will you be the man?"

"I?" cried D'Aiguillon; "are you mad, uncle?"

"Mad! What! you are not already on your knees before him who gives you this advice? What! you do not bound with joy? You do not burn with gratitude? You are not already out of your senses with delight at the manner in which she received you? You are not yet mad with

love? Go, go!" cried the old marshal, "since the days of Alcibiades there has been but one Richelieu in the world, and I see there will be no more after him."

"My uncle," replied the duke, with much agitation, either feigned, and in that case it was admirably counterfeited, or real, for the proposition was sudden, "my uncle, I perceive all the advantage you would gain by the position of which you speak; you would govern with the authority of M. de Choiseul, and I should be the lover who would constitute that authority. The plan is worthy of the cleverest man in France, but you have forgotten one thing in projecting it."

"What!" cried Richelieu uneasily, "is it possible you do not love Madame Dubarry? Is that it?—fool!—triple fool!—wretch!—is that it?"

"Ah! no, that is not it, my dear uncle," cried D'Aiguillon, as if he knew that not one of his words was lost; "Madame Dubarry, whom I scarcely know, seems to me the most charming of women. I should, on the contrary, love Madame Dubarry madly, I should love her only too well; that is not the question."

"What is it, then?"

"This, my lord duke. Madame Dubarry will never love me, and the first condition of such an alliance is love. How do you imagine the beautiful countess could distinguish among all the gentlemen of this brilliant court—surrounded as she is by the homage of so much youth and beauty—how should she distinguish one who has no merit, who is already no longer young, who is overwhelmed with sorrows, and who hides himself from all eyes because he feels that he will soon disappear for ever? My uncle, if I had known Madame Dubarry in the period of my youth and beauty, when women admired in me all that is lovable in a man, then she might have given me a place in her memory. That would have been much. But now there is no hope—neither past, nor present, nor future. No, uncle, we must renounce this chimera. You have pierced my heart by presenting it to me in such bright and glowing colours."

During this tirade, which was delivered with a fire which Molé might have envied, and Lekain would have thought worthy of imitation, Richelieu bit his lips, muttering to himself:

"Has the man guessed that the countess is listening? Peste! he is a clever dog. He is a master of his craft. In that case, I must take care!"

Richelieu was right; the countess was listening, and every word D'Aiguillon spoke sunk deep into her heart. She eagerly drank in the charm of this confession, and appreciated his exquisite delicacy in not betraying the secret of their former intimacy to his nearest confidant, for fear of throwing a shadow over a perhaps still dearly cherished portrait.

"Then you refuse?" said Richelieu.

"Oh! as for that, yes, my uncle, for unfortunately I see it is impossible."

"But try, at least, unfortunate that you are!"

"And how?"

"You are here one of us—you will see the countess every day; please her, morbleu!"

"With an interested aim? Never! If I should be so unfortunate as to please her with this unworthy view, I should flee to the end of the world, for I should be ashamed of myself."

Richelieu scratched his chin.

"The thing is settled," said he to himself, "or D'Aiguillon is a fool."

All at once a noise was heard in the court-yard, and several voices cried out, "The king!"

"Diable!" cried Richelieu, "the king must not see me here; I shall make my escape."

"And I?" said the duke.

"It is different with you; he must see you. Remain; and, for God's sake, do not throw the handle after the axe."

With these words Richelieu stole out by the back-stairs, saying, as he left the room:

"Adieu till to-morrow."

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE KING DIVIDES THE SPOILS.

WHEN the Duke d Aiguillon was left alone, he felt at first somewhat embarrassed. He had perfectly understood all his uncle had said to him—perfectly understood that Madame Dubarry was listening—perfectly understood, in short, that, for a clever man, it was necessary in this conjuncture to seem a man of heart, and to play alone that part in which the old marshal sought to obtain a share.

The king's arrival luckily interrupted the explanation which must have resulted from the puritanical declaration of M. d'Aiguillon.

The marshal was not a man to remain long a dupe, nor above all one who would make another's virtue shine with exaggerated brilliancy at the expense of his own.

But, being left alone, D'Aiguillon had time to reflect.

The king had in truth arrived. Already his pages had opened the door of the antechamber, and Zamore had darted towards the monarch, begging for bonbons—a touching familiarity which Louis, when he was in a bad temper, punished by sundry fillips on the nose or boxes on the ears, both exceedingly disagreeable to the young African.

The king installed himself in the Chinese cabinet; and what convinced D'Aiguillon that Madame Dubarry had not lost a word of his conversation with his uncle, was the fact that he, D'Aiguillon, overheard the entire interview between Madame Dubarry and the king.

His majesty seemed fatigued, like a man who has raised an immense weight. Atlas was less enfeebled when his day's work was done, and when he had held the world suspended on his shoulders for twelve hours.

Louis XV. allowed his favourite to thank, applaud, and caress him, and tell him the whole particulars of M. de Choiseul's departure, which amused him exceedingly.

Then Madame Dubarry ventured. It was fair weather for politics; and besides, she felt herself strong enough at that moment to have raised one of the four quarters of the world.

"Sire," said she, "you have destroyed, that is well; you have demolished, that is superb; but now you must think about rebuilding."

"Oh! it is done," said the king, carelessly.

"You have a ministry!"

"Yes."

"What! all at once, without breathing?"

"See what it is to want common sense. Oh!—woman that you are!—

before sending away your cook, must you not, as you said the other day, have a new one in readiness?"

"Repeat to me that you have formed the cabinet."

The king raised himself upon the immense sofa on which he was lying rather than sitting, using the shoulders of the beautiful countess for his principal cushion.

"One would think, Jeannette," said he, "to hear you making yourself so uneasy, that you know my ministry, and wish to find fault with them, or propose another."

"Well," said the countess, "that would not be so absurd as you seem to imagine."

"Indeed? Then you have a ministry?"

"You have one, have you not?" replied she.

"Oh! it is my place to have one, countess. Let me see your candidates."

"By no means; tell me yours."

"Most willingly, to set you the example."

"In the first place, then, who have you for the navy, where that dear M. de Praslin was?"

"Ah! something new, countess; a charming man, who has never seen the sea."

"Who is it?"

"'Pon honour, it is a splendid idea. I shall make myself very popular, and I shall be crowned in the most distant seas—in effigy, of course."

"But who, sire? Who is it?"

"I would wager you do not guess in a thousand attempts. It is a member of parliament, my dear; the first president of the parliament of Besançon."

"M. de Boynes?"

"The same. Peste! how learned you are! You know all these people!"

"I cannot help it; you talk parliament to me the whole day. Why, the man would not know an oar if he saw it."

"So much the better. M. de Praslin knew his duties too well, and made me pay dearly for all his naval constructions."

"Well, the finance department, sire?"

"Oh! that is a different affair; I have chosen a special man."

"A financier?"

"No; a soldier. The financiers have crushed me too long already."

"Good heavens! And the war department?"

"Do not be uneasy; for that I have chosen a financier, Terray. He is a terrible scrutinizer of accounts! He will find errors in all M. de Choiseul's additions. I may tell you that I had some idea of putting a wonderful man in the war department—every inch a man, as they say. It was to please the philosophers."

"Good. But who? Voltaire?"

"Almost. The Chevalier de Muy—a Cato."

"Oh heaven! You alarm me."

"It was all arranged. I had sent for the man, his commission was signed, he had thanked me, when my good or my evil genius—judge which—prompted me to ask him to come to Luciennes this evening to sup and chat with us."

"Fie! Horrible!"

"Well, countess, that was exactly what De Muy replied."

"He said that to you?"

"Expressed in other words, countess. He said that his most ardent

wish was to serve the king, but as for serving Madame Dubarry, it was impossible."

"Well, that was polite of your philosopher."

"You must know, countess, I held out my hand to him—for his brevet, which I tore in pieces with a most patient smile, and the chevalier disappeared. Louis XIV. would have let the rascal rot in one of those ugly dens in the Bastille; but I am Louis XV., and I have a parliament which gives me the whip, in place of my giving it to the parliament. Ha!"

"No matter, sire," said the countess, covering her royal lover with kisses, "you are not the less a clever man."

"That is not what the world in general says. Terray is execrated."

"Who is not? And for foreign affairs?"

"That honest fellow, Bertin, whom you know."

"No."

"Then whom you do not know."

"But, among them all, I cannot find one good minister."

"So be it; now tell me yours."

"I will only tell you one."

"You dare not tell me; you are afraid."

"The marshal."

"The marshal? What marshal?" said the king, making a wry face.

"The Duke de Richelieu."

"That old man? That chicken-hearted wretch?"

"Good! The conqueror of Mahon a chicken-hearted wretch!"

"That old debauchée?"

"Sire, your companion."

"An immoral man, who frightens all the women."

"That is only since he no longer runs after them."

"Do not speak to me of Richelieu; he is my raw-head-and-bloody-bones. The conqueror of Mahon took me into all the gaming-houses in Paris. We were lampooned. No! no!—Richelieu! The very name puts me beside myself."

"You hate them so much?"

"Whom?"

"The Richelieus."

"I abhor them."

"All?"

"All. What a worthy duke and peer M. Fronsac makes. He has deserved the rack twenty times."

"I give him up; but there are more Richelieus in the world than he."

"Ah! yes; D'Aiguillon."

"Well?"

The reader may judge if, at these words, the ears of the nephew were not strained in the boudoir.

"I ought to hate him more than all the others, for he hounds all the bawlers in France upon me; and yet—it is a weakness which I cannot conquer—he is bold and does not displease me."

"He is a man of spirit!" cried the countess.

"A brave man, and zealous in the defence of the royal prerogative. He is a model of a peer!"

"Yes, yes—a hundred times, yes! Make something of him."

The king looked at the countess and folded his arms.

"What, countess! Is it possible that you propose such a thing to me, when all France demands that I should exile and degrade this man?"

Madame Dubarry folded her arms in her turn.

"Just now," said she, "you called Richelieu chicken-hearted—the name belongs more properly to yourself."

"Oh, countess!"

"You are very proud because you have dismissed M. de Choiseul."

"Well, it was not an easy task."

"You have done it, and you have done well; but you are afraid of the consequences."

"I!"

"Of course. What do you accomplish by sending away M. de Choiseul?"

"Give the parliament a kick in the seat of honour."

"And you will not give them two? Diable! Raise both your feet—one after the other, be it understood. The parliament wished to keep Choiseul; you send him away. They want to send away D'Aiguillon: keep him."

"I do not send him away."

"Keep him—improved and considerably enlarged."

"You want an office for this firebrand?"

"I want a recompense for him who defended you at the risk of his position and fortune."

"Say of his life, for he will be stoned some fine morning, along with your friend Maupeou."

"You would encourage your defenders very much, if they could only hear you."

"They pay me back with interest, countess."

"Do not say so; facts contradict you in this case."

"Ah, well! But why this eagerness for D'Aiguillon?"

"Eagerness! I do not know him; I have seen and spoken to him to-day for the first time."

"Ah! that is a different affair. Then it is from conviction of his merit—and I respect conviction in others, because I never have it myself."

"Then give Richelieu something in D'Aiguillon's name, since you will not give D'Aiguillon anything in his own."

"Richelieu? nothing! Never, never, never!"

"Then something to M. d'Aiguillon, since you refuse Richelieu?"

"What! give him a portfolio! That is impossible at present."

"I understand that; but after some time, perhaps. Remember that he is a man of resources and action, and that with Terray, D'Aiguillon, and Maupeou you will have the three heads of Cerberus. Remember, too, that your ministry is only a jest which cannot last."

"You are mistaken, countess, it will last three months."

"In three months, then, I have your promise?"

"Oh! oh! countess."

"That is enough; in the meantime, something for the present."

"But I have nothing."

"You have the light horse; M. d'Aiguillon is an officer—what is called a sword; give him your light horse."

"Very well, he shall have them."

"Thanks!" exclaimed the countess, transported with joy, "a thousand thanks!"

And M. d'Aiguillon could hear a very plebeian kiss resound on the cheeks of his majesty Louis XV.

"In the meantime," said the king, "order supper to be served, countess."

"No," said she, "there is nothing here; you have overpowered me with politics. My people have made speeches and fireworks, but no supper."

"Then come to Marly, I will take you with me."

"Impossible! My poor head is splitting in pieces."

"With headache?"

"Dreadful headache."

"You must go to bed, countess."

"I am just going to do so, sire."

"Adieu! then."

"Au revoir, rather."

"I am somewhat like M. de Choiseul; I am dismissed."

"Yes, but accompanied, feasted, cajoled," said the giddy creature, pushing the king gently towards the door, and from thence to the foot of the stairs, laughing loudly, and turning round at each step.

On the peristyle the countess stopped, candle in hand.

"Countess," said the king, turning round and ascending a step.

"Sire?"

"I trust the poor marshal will not die of it."

"Of what?"

"Of the portfolio which he has missed."

"How ill-natured you are!" said the countess, escorting him with another loud laugh.

And his majesty drove off, very much delighted with his last quolibet upon the duke, whom he really hated.

When Madame Dubarry returned to her boudoir, she found D'Aiguillon on his knees before the door, his hands clasped, his eyes ardently fixed upon her.

She blushed.

"I have failed," said she. "The poor marshal!"

"Oh, I know all!" said he; "I could hear—thanks, madame—thanks!"

"I thought I owed you that," she replied, with a sweet smile; "but rise, duke, else I shall think your memory is as retentive as your mind is highly cultivated."

"That may well be, madame; my uncle has told you I am nothing but your admiring and zealous servant."

"And the king's; to-morrow you must go and pay your respects to his majesty—rise, I beg."

And she gave him her hand, which he kissed respectfully.

The countess seemed to be deeply moved, for she did not add a single word.

M. d'Aiguillon was also silent, as deeply moved as she. At last, Madame Dubarry, raising her head, said:

"Poor marshal! he must know this defeat."

M. d'Aiguillon looked upon these words as a dismissal, and bowed.

"Madame," said he, "I am going to him."

"Oh, duke! unpleasant news is always soon enough told; do something better—sup with me!"

The day was gained. D'Aiguillon, as we have seen, was a lucky man.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE ANTECHAMBERS OF THE DUKE DE RICHELIEU.

M. DE RICHELIEU, like all the courtiers, had an hotel at Versailles, one at Paris, a house at Marly, and another at Luciennes; a residence, in short, near each of the palaces or residences of the king.

Louis XIV. when he multiplied his places of residence so much, had imposed on all men of rank—on all those privileged to attend at the grand and little receptions and levées, the obligation of being very rich, that they might keep pace at once with the splendour of his household, and the flights of his whims.

At the period of the disgrace of MM. de Choiseul and De Praslin, M. de Richelieu was living in his house at Versailles; and it was there that he returned after having presented his nephew to Madame Dubarry at Luciennes.

Richelieu had been seen in the forest of Marly with the countess, he had been seen at Versailles after the minister's disgrace, his long and secret audience at Luciennes was known; and this, with the indiscretions of Jean Dubarry, was sufficient for the whole court to think themselves obliged to go and pay their respects to M. de Richelieu.

The old marshal was now going in his turn to inhale that delightful incense of praises, flatteries, and caresses, which every interested person offered without discrimination to the idol of the day.

M. de Richelieu, however, was far from expecting all that was to happen to him; but he rose that morning with the firm resolution of closing his nostrils against the incense, as Ulysses closed his ears with wax against the songs of the sirens. The result which he expected could not be known until next day, when the nomination of the new minister would be announced by the king himself.

Great was the marshal's surprise therefore when he awoke, or rather, was awakened by the loud noise of carriages, to hear from his valet that the court-yards of the hotel, as well as the ante-rooms and saloons, were filled with visitors.

"Oh!" said he, "it seems I make some noise already."

"It is still early, my lord marshal," said his valet-de-chambre, seeing the duke's haste in taking off his nightcap.

"Henceforward," replied the duke, "there will be no such word as early for me, remember that."

"Yes, sir."

"What did you reply to the visitors?"

"That you were not up yet."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"That was exceedingly stupid. You should have added that I was late up last night, or better still, you should have—let me see, where is Rafte?"

"M. Rafte is asleep," said the valet.

"What! asleep! let him be called, the wretch!"

"Well," said a fresh and smiling old man, who appeared at the door, "here is Rafte; what is he wanted for?"

All the duke's bombast ceased at these words.

"Ah! I was certain that you were not asleep."

"And if I had been asleep, where would have been the wonder? It is scarcely daylight."

"But, my dear Rafte, you see that I do not sleep."

"That is another thing, you are a minister—how should you sleep?"

"Oh! now you are going to scold me," said the marshal, making a wry face before the glass; "are you not satisfied?"

"I! What benefit is it to me? You will fatigue yourself to death and then you will be ill. The consequence will be that I shall have to govern the state, and that is not so amusing, sir."

"How old you are getting, Rafte!"

"I am just four years younger than yourself, sir. Yes, I am getting old."

The marshal stamped with impatience.

"Did you come through the antechambers?" asked he.

"Yes."

"Who is there?"

"All the world."

"What do they speak of?"

"Every one is telling what favours he is going to ask from you."

"That is very natural. But what did you hear about my appointment?"

"Oh! I would much rather not tell you that."

"What! Criticisms already?"

"Yes, and from those who have need of your assistance! What will they say, sir, whose assistance you need?"

"Ah! Rafte," said the old man, affecting to laugh, "those who would say you flatter me——"

"Well, sir," said Rafte, "why the devil did you harness yourself to this wagon called a ministry? Are you tired of living and of being happy?"

"My dear fellow, I have tasted everything but that."

"Corbleu! you have never tasted arsenic! Why do you not take some in your chocolate, from curiosity?"

"Rafte, you are an idle dog; you think that, as my secretary, you will have more work, and you shrink—you confessed as much, indeed."

The marshal dressed himself with care.

"Give me a military air," said he to his valet, "and hand me my military orders."

"It seems we are in the war department?" said Rafte.

"Good heavens! yes. It seems we are there."

"Oh! But I have not seen the king's appointment," continued Rafte; "it is not confirmed yet."

"The appointment will come in good time, no doubt."

"Then, *no doubt* is the official word to-day?"

"You become more disagreeable, Rafte, as you get older. You are a formalist, and superstitiously particular. If I had known that, I would not have allowed you to deliver my inauguration speech at the Académie; that made you pedantic."

"But listen, my lord; since we are in the government, let us be regular. This is a very odd affair."

"What is odd?"

"Monsieur the Count de la Vaudraye, whom I met just now in the street, told me that nothing had yet been settled about the ministry."

Richelieu smiled.

"M. de la Vaudraye is right," said he. "But have you already been out, then?"

"Pardieu! I was obliged. This cursed noise of carriages awoke me; I dressed, put on my military orders also, and took a turn in the town."

"Ah! M. Rafte makes merry at my expense."

"Oh! my lord, God forbid. But——"

"But what?"

"On my walk, I met some one."

"Whom?"

"The secretary of the Abbé Terray."

"Well?"

"Well! he told me that his master was appointed to the war department."

"Oh! ho!" said Richelieu, with his eternal smile.

"What does monseigneur conclude from this?"

"That if M. Terray is appointed to the war department, I am not; that if he is not, I may perhaps be."

Rafte had satisfied his conscience; he was a bold, indefatigable, ambitious man, as clever as his master, and much better armed than he, for he knew himself to be of low origin and dependent, two defects in his coat of mail which for forty years he had exercised all his cunning, strength, and acuteness to obviate. When Rafte saw his master so confident, he believed he had nothing more to fear.

"Come, my lord," said he, "make haste; do not oblige them to wait too long; that would be a bad commencement."

"I am ready; but tell me once more who is there?"

"Here is the list."

He presented a long list to his master, who saw with increasing satisfaction the names of the first among the nobility, the law, and the finance.

"Suppose I should be popular, hey, Rafte?"

"We are in the age of miracles," replied the latter.

"Ha! Taverney!" said the marshal, continuing to peruse the list. "What does he come here for?"

"I have not the least idea, my lord marshal; but come, make your entrée," and the secretary, with an authoritative air, almost pushed his master into the grand saloon.

Richelieu ought to have been satisfied; his reception might have contented the ambition of a prince of the blood royal. But the refined cunning and craft which characterised the period, and particularly the class of society we are speaking of, only too well assisted Richelieu's unlucky star, which had such a disagreeable contretemps in store for him.

From propriety and respect for etiquette, all this crowded levée abstained from pronouncing the word minister before Richelieu; some were bold enough to venture as far as the word congratulation, but they knew that they must pass quickly over the word, and that Richelieu would scarcely reply to it.

For one and all, this morning visit was a simple demonstration of respect, a mere expression of good-will; for at this period such almost imperceptible shades of policy were frequently understood and acted upon by the general mass of the community. There were certain of the courtiers who even ventured, in the course of conversation, to express some wish, desire, or hope.

The one would have wished, he said, to have his government rather nearer Versailles; and it gratified him to have an opportunity of speaking on the subject to a man of such great influence as M. de Richelieu.

Another said he had been three times forgotten by M. de Choiseul in the promotions of the knights of the order, and he reckoned upon M. de Richelieu's obliging memory to refresh the king's, now that there existed no obstacle in the way of his majesty's good-will. In short, a hundred requests more or less grasping, but all veiled by the highest art, were preferred to the delighted ears of the marshal.

Gradually the crowd retired; they wished, as they said, to leave the marshal to his *important occupations.*

One man alone remained in the saloon; he had not approached as the others had; he had asked for nothing; he had not even presented himself.

When the courtiers had gone, this man advanced towards the duke with a smile upon his lips.

"Ah! Monsieur de Taverney!" said the marshal; "I am enchanted to see you, truly enchanted."

"I was waiting, duke, to pay you my compliments, and to offer you my sincere congratulations."

"Ah! indeed? and for what?" replied Richelieu, for the cautious reserve of his visitors had imposed upon him the necessity of being discreet, and even mysterious.

"On your new dignity, duke."

"Hush, hush!" said the marshal, "let us not speak of that; nothing is settled; it is a mere rumour."

"Nevertheless, my dear marshal, there are many people of my opinion, for your saloons were full."

"In truth, I do not know why."

"Oh! I know very well."

"Why then? Why?"

"One word from me."

"What word?"

"Yesterday I had the honour of paying my respects to the king at Trianon. His majesty spoke to me of my children, and ended by saying: 'You know M. de Richelieu, I think; pay your compliments to him.'"

"Ah! his majesty said that?" replied Richelieu, with a glow of pride, as if these words had been the official brevet, the destination of which Rafte doubted, or at least deplored its delay.

"So that," continued Taverney, "I soon suspected the truth; in fact, it was not difficult to do so, when I saw the eagerness of all Versailles; and I hastened to obey the king by paying my compliments to you, and to gratify my own feelings by reminding you of our old friendship."

The duke had now reached a pitch of intoxication. It is a defect in our nature from which the highest minds cannot always preserve themselves. He saw in Taverney only one of those expectants of the lowest order—poor devils who have fallen behind on the road of favour, who are useless even as protégés, useless as acquaintances, and who are reproached with coming forth from their obscurity, after a lapse of twenty years, to warm themselves at the sun of another's prosperity.

"I see what you are aiming at," said the marshal, harshly; "you have some favour to ask of me."

"You have said it, duke."

"Ah!" grumbled Richelieu, seating himself on, or rather plumping into, the sofa.

"I told you I had two children," continued Taverney, pliant and cunning, for he perceived the coolness of his great friend, and therefore only

advanced the more eagerly: "I have a daughter whom I love very dearly, and who is a model of virtue and beauty. She is placed with her highness the dauphiness, who has been condescending enough to grant her her particular esteem. Of my beautiful Andrée, therefore, I need not speak to you. Her path is smoothed; her fortune is made. Have you seen my daughter? Did I not once present her to you somewhere? Have you not heard of her?"

"Pshaw!—I don't know," said Richelieu, carelessly, "perhaps so."

"No matter," pursued Taverney, "there is my daughter settled. For my own part, I want nothing; the king grants me a pension upon which I can live. I confess I would like to have some emolument to enable me to rebuild Maison-Rouge, where I wish to end my days, and with your interest and my daughter's——"

"Ha!" thought Richelieu, who until now had not listened, so lost was he in contemplation of his grandeur, but whom the words, "my daughter's interest," had roused from his reverie. "Oh! ho! your daughter! Why, she is a young beauty who annoys our good countess; she is a little scorpion who is sheltering herself under the wings of the dauphiness, in order to bite some one at Luciennes. Come, I will not be a bad friend, and as for gratitude, this dear countess who has made me a minister shall see it I am wanting in time of need." Then aloud:

"Proceed," said he to the Baron de Taverney in a haughty tone.

"Faith, I am near the end," replied the latter, promising himself to laugh in his sleeve at the vain marshal if he could only get what he wanted from him. "I am anxious, therefore, only about my son Philip, who bears a lofty name, but who will never be able to support it worthily unless some one assists him. Philip is a bold and thoughtful youth; rather too thoughtful, perhaps, but that is the result of his embarrassed position. You know, the horse which is reined in too tightly droops its head."

"What is all this to me?" thought Richelieu, giving most unequivocal signs of weariness and impatience.

"I want some one," continued Taverney remorselessly, "some one in authority like yourself, to procure a company for Philip. Her highness the dauphiness, on entering Strasbourg, raised him to the rank of captain, but he still wants a hundred thousand livres to enable him to purchase a company in some privileged regiment of cavalry. Procure that for me, my powerful friend."

"Your son," said Richelieu, "is the young man who rendered the dauphiness a service, is he not?"

"A most essential service," replied Taverney; "it was he who forced the last relay for her royal highness from that Dubarry who wanted to seize it by force."

"Oh, oh!" thought Richelieu, "that is just it; the most violent enemies of the countess. He comes at the right time, this Taverney! He advances claims which are sufficient to damn him for ever."

"You do not answer, duke?" said Taverney, rather soured by the marshal's obstinate silence.

"It is perfectly impossible, my dear M. de Taverney," replied the marshal, rising to show that the audience was over.

"Impossible? Such a trifle impossible? An old friend tell me that?"

"Why not? Is it any reason, because you are a friend, as you say, that you should seek to make me commit treason both against friendship and justice? You never came to see me for twenty years, for during that time I was nothing; now that I am a minister, you come."

"M. de Richelieu, it is you who are unjust at this moment."

"No, my dear friend, no; I do not wish to see you dangling in my antechambers; I am a true friend, and therefore——"

"You have some reason for refusing me, then?"

"I!" exclaimed Richelieu, much alarmed at the suspicion Taverney might perhaps form; "I! a reason."

"Yes; I have enemies."

The duke might have replied what he thought, but that would have been to discover to the baron that he tried to please Madame Dubarry from gratitude—it would have been to confess that he was the minister of the favourite; and that the marshal would not have confessed for an empire. He therefore hastily replied:

"You have no enemy, my dear friend; but I have many. To grant requests at once, without examining claims, would expose me to the accusations of continuing the Choiseul system. My dear sir, I wish to leave behind some trace of my administration of affairs. For twenty years I have projected reforms, improvements, and now they shall blossom. Favouritism is the ruin of France; I will protect merit. The writings of our philosophers are bright torches, whose light has not shone for me in vain; they have dissipated all the mists of ignorance and superstition which brooded over the past, and it was full time it should be so, for the well-being of the state. I shall therefore examine your son's claims neither more nor less than I should do those of any other citizen. I must make this sacrifice to my conscience—a grievous sacrifice, no doubt, but which, after all, is only that of one man for the benefit of three hundred thousand. If your son, M. Philip de Taverney, proves that he merits my favour, he shall have it, not because his father is my friend, not because he bears the name he does, but because he is a man of merit. That is my plan of conduct."

"You mean your system of philosophy," replied the old baron, biting his nails with rage, and adding to his anger by reflecting how much humiliation and how many petty cowardices this interview had cost him

"Philosophy, if you will, sir; it is a noble word."

"Which dispenses good things, marshal, does it not?"

"You are a bad courtier," said Richelieu, with a cold smile.

"Men of my rank are courtiers only of the king."

"Oh! M. Rafte, my secretary, has a thousand of your rank in my antechambers every day," replied Richelieu; "they generally come from some obscure den or other in the provinces, where they have learned to be rude to their pretended friends while they preach concord."

"Oh! I am well aware that a Maison-Rouge, a title which dates from the crusades, does not understand concord so well as a Vignerol fiddler."

The marshal had more tact than Taverney. He could have had him thrown out of the windows, but he only shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"You are rather behind the time, most noble scion of the crusades; you only remember the calumnious memoir presented by parliament in 1720, and have not read that of the peers and dukes in reply. Be kind enough to walk into my library, my dear sir; Rafte will give it to you to read."

As he was bowing his antagonist out with this apt repartee, the door opened, and a man entered noisily, crying:

"Where is my dear duke?"

This man, with ruddy visage, eyes dilated with satisfaction, and joyous air, was neither more nor less than Jean Dubarry.

On seeing this new-comer, Taverney started back with surprise and vexation.

Jean saw the movement, recognised the face, and turned his back.

"I understand," said the baron, quietly, "and I shall retire. I leave the minister in most distinguished company."

And he left the room with dignity.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

RICHELIEU IS DISABUSED.

FURIOUS at this extremely provoking exit, Jean made two steps after the baron; then, returning to the marshal, he said, shrugging his shoulders:

"You receive such people here?"

"Oh! my dear sir, you mistake; on the contrary, I send such people away."

"Do you know who this gentleman is?"

"Alas! Yes."

"No, but do you know really?"

"He is a Taverney."

"He is a man who wishes to make his daughter the king's favourite—"

"Oh, come!"

"A man who wishes to supplant us, and who takes all possible means to do so. But Jean is there, and Jean has his eyes about him."

"You think he wishes——"

"It is a very difficult matter to see what he wishes, is it not? One of the dauphin's party, my dear sir;—and they have their little stabber too."

"Bah!"

"A young man, who looks quite ready to fly at people's throats—a bully, who pinks Jean's shoulder—poor Jean!"

"Yours? Is it a personal enemy of yours, my dear count?" asked Richelieu, feigning surprise.

"Yes; he was my adversary in that affair of the relay, you know."

"Indeed! What a strange sympathy. I did not know that, and yet I refused all his demands; only, if I had known, I should not only have refused him but kicked him out. But do not be uneasy, count, I have now this worthy bully under my thumb, and he shall find it out to his cost."

"Yes, you can cure him of his taste for attacking people on the highway. For in fact——ha! by-the-bye, I have not yet congratulated you."

"Why, yes, count; it seems the affair is definitively settled."

"Oh! it is all completed. Will you permit me to embrace you?"

"With all my heart."

"Faith, there was some trouble; but the trouble is nothing when you succeed. You are satisfied, are you not?"

"Shall I speak frankly? Yes; for I think I can be useful."

"No doubt of that. But it is a bold stroke; there will be some growling."

"Am I not liked by the public?"

"You? Why, there is no question of you, either one way or other; it is he who is execrated."

"He?" said Richelieu, with surprise; "who? he?"

"Of course," interrupted Jean. "Oh! the parliament will revolt, it will be a second edition of the flagellation of Louis XIV. They are whipped, duke, they are whipped."

"Explain."

"Why, it explains itself. The parliament of course hate the author of their persecutions."

"Ah! you think that?"

"I am certain of it, as all France is. No matter, duke, it was a capital stroke of you to send for him that way, just at the very heat of the affair."

"Whom? Whom, duke? I am on thorns—I do not understand one word of what you say."

"Why, I speak of M. d'Aiguillon, your nephew."

"Well! what then?"

"Well, I say it was well-advised of you to send for him."

"Ah! very good, very good. You mean to say he will assist me?"

"He will assist us all. Do you know he is on the best terms with little Jeanne?"

"Oh! indeed?"

"On the best terms. They have already had a chat together, and understand each other perfectly, as it seems to me."

"You know that?"

"Why, I saw D'Aiguillon's carriage leave Luciennes late yesterday evening, and as he only arrived yesterday morning in Paris, it seems to me that he must be a great favourite with Jeanne to obtain an audience so early."

"Yes, yes," said Richelieu, rubbing his hands; "he must have supped there. Bravo, D'Aiguillon!"

"And so there you are all three, like Orestes and Pylades, with the addition of another Pylades."

At this moment, and as the marshal was rubbing his hands with great glee, D'Aiguillon entered the saloon.

The nephew saluted his uncle with an air of condolence which was sufficient to enable Richelieu, without understanding the whole truth, at least to guess the greatest part of it.

He turned pale, as though he had received a mortal wound. It flashed across his mind that at court there exist neither friends nor relatives, and that every one seeks only his own aggrandisement.

"I was a great fool!" thought he. "Well, D'Aiguillon?" continued he aloud, repressing a deep sigh.

"Well, marshal?"

"It is a heavy blow to the parliament," said Richelieu, repeating Jean's words.

D'Aiguillon blushed.

"You know it?" said he.

"The count has told me all," replied Richelieu; "even your late stay at Luciennes last night. Your appointment is a triumph for my family."

"Be assured, marshal, of my extreme regret."

"What the devil does he mean by that?" said Jean, folding his arms.

"Oh, we understand each other," interrupted Richelieu; "we understand each other."

"That is a different affair; but for my part I do not understand you. Regret! Ah! yes, because he will not be recognised as minister immediately—yes, yes, I see."

"Oh! there will be an interim?" said the marshal, feeling a ray of hope

—that constant guest in the heart of the ambitious man and the lover—once more dawn in his breast.

"Yes, marshal, an interim."

"But, in the meantime," cried Jean, "he is tolerably well paid; the finest command in Versailles."

"Ah! a command?" said Richelieu, pierced by a new wound.

"M. Dubarry perhaps exaggerates a little," said the Duke d'Aiguillon.

"But, in one word, what is this command?"

"The king's light horse."

Richelieu again felt his furrowed cheeks grow pale.

"Oh! yes," said he, with a smile which it would be impossible to describe; "yes, it is indeed a trifling appointment for such a charming man. But what can you expect, duke—the loveliest woman in the world were she even the king's favourite, can only give what she has."

It was now D'Aiguillon's turn to grow pale.

Jean was scrutinising the beautiful Murillos which adorned Richelieu's walls.

Richelieu slapped his nephew on the shoulder.

"Luckily," said he, "you have the promise of approaching advancement. Accept my congratulations, duke—my sincere compliments. Your address, your cleverness in negotiations, is only equalled by your good fortune. Adieu; I have some business to transact. Do not forget me in the distribution of your favours, my dear minister."

D'Aiguillon only replied:

"Your interests and mine, my lord marshal, are henceforth one and the same."

And, saluting his uncle, he left the room with the dignity which was natural to him; thus escaping from one of the most embarrassing positions he had ever experienced in a life strewn with so many difficulties.

"An admirable trait in D'Aiguillon's character," said Richelieu, the moment the former had disappeared, to Jean, who was rather at a loss to know what to think of this exchange of politeness between the nephew and uncle, "and one that I admire particularly, is his artlessness. He is at once frank and high-spirited; he knows the court, and is withal as simple-minded as a girl."

"And then he loves you so well!" said Jean.

"Like a lamb."

"Oh," said Jean, "he is more like your son than M. de Fronsac."

"By my faith, yes, count—by my faith, yes."

Whilst replying thus, Richelieu kept walking round his chair in great agitation; he sought but could not find.

"Ah, countess," he muttered, "you shall pay me for this!"

"Marshal," said Jean, with a cunning look, "we four will realise that famous faggot of antiquity; you know, the one that could not be broken."

"We four, my dear M. Jean! how do you understand that?"

"My sister as power, D'Aiguillon as authority, you as advice, and I as vigilance."

"Very good! very good!"

"And now let them attack my sister; I defy them all."

"Pardieu!" said Richelieu, whose brain was boiling.

"Let them set up rivals now!" exclaimed Jean, in ecstacies with his plans and his visions of triumph.

"Oh!" said Richelieu, striking his forehead.

"Well, my dear marshal, what is the matter?"

"Nothing! I think your idea of a league admirable."

"Is it not?"

"And I enter body and soul into your plans."

"Bravo!"

"Does Taverney live at Trianon with his daughter?"

"No; he lives in Paris."

"The girl is very handsome, my dear count."

"If she were as beautiful as Cleopatra or—my sister, I do not fear her, now that we are leagued together."

"You said Taverney lives in Paris, in the Rue St. Honoré, I think?"

"I did not say Rue St. Honoré; it is the Rue Coq-Heron in which he lives. Have you any plan of chastising these Taverneys, that you ask?"

"Yes, count, I think I have found a capital plan."

"You are an incomparable man, but I must leave you now; I wish to see what they say in town."

"Adieu, then, count. Apropos, you have not told me who the new ministers are."

"Oh, mere birds of passage: Terray, Bertin, and I know not who else. Mere counters in the hands of D'Aiguillon—the real minister, though his appointment is deferred for a short time."

"Perhaps indefinitely adjourned," thought the marshal, directing his most gracious smile to Jean as an affectionate adieu.

Jean retired, Rafte entered. He had heard all, and knew how to conduct himself; all his suspicions were now realised. He did not utter a word to his master, he knew him too well. He did not even call the valet-de-chambre; he assisted him with his own hands to undress, and conducted him to his bed, in which the old marshal, shivering with fever, immediately buried himself, after taking a pill which his secretary made him swallow.

Rafte drew the curtains and retired. The ante-chamber was thronged with eager listening valets. Rafte took the head valet aside.

"Attend to the marshal carefully," said he, "he is ill. He has had a serious vexation this morning; he was obliged to disobey the king."

"Disobey the king!" exclaimed the alarmed valet.

"Yes, his majesty sent a portfolio to my lord, but as he was aware that he owed it to the solicitations of the Dubarry, he refused. Oh! it was a noble resolve, and the Parisians ought to build him a triumphal arch; but the shock was great, and our master is ill. Look to him carefully!"

After these words, whose circulating power he knew beforehand, Rafte returned to his closet.

A quarter of an hour afterwards all Versailles was informed of the noble conduct and lofty patriotism of the marshal, who in the meantime slept soundly upon the popularity his secretary had gained for him.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE DAUPHIN'S FAMILY REPAST.

THE same day, about three o'clock, Mademoiselle Taverney left her apartment to attend upon the dauphiness, who was in the habit of being read to for a short time before dinner.

The abbé who had held the post of first reader to her royal highness no longer exercised his functions, as, for some time previous, ever since certain diplomatic intrigues in which he had displayed a very great talent for business, he had employed himself entirely in important political affairs.

Mademoiselle Taverney therefore set out, dressed as well as circumstances would permit, to fulfil her office. Like all the guests at Trianon, she still suffered considerable inconvenience from the rather sudden installation in her new abode, and had not yet been able to arrange her furniture, or make the necessary provisions for establishing her modest household. She had therefore, on the present occasion, been assisted in her toilet by one of the femmes-de-chambre of Madame de Noailles, that starched lady of honour whom the dauphiness nicknamed Madame Etiquette.

Andrée was dressed in a blue silk robe, with long waist, which fitted admirably to her slender figure. This robe opened in front, and displayed beneath a muslin skirt relieved with three falls of embroidery. Short sleeves, also of muslin, embroidered in the same manner as the dress, and festooned and tapering to the shoulder, were admirably in keeping with a habit shirt, worked à la paysanne, which modestly concealed her neck and shoulders. Her beautiful hair, which fell in long and luxuriant ringlets upon her shoulders, was simply tied with a ribbon of the same colour as her dress, a mode of arrangement which harmonised infinitely better with the noble, yet modest and retiring air of the lovely young girl, and with her pure and transparent complexion never yet sullied by the touch of rouge, than the feathers, ornaments, and laces which were then in vogue.

As she walked, Andrée drew on a pair of white silk mittens upon the slenderest and roundest fingers in the world, while the tiny points of her high-heeled shoes of pale blue satin left their traces on the gravel of the garden walk.

When she reached the pavilion of Trianon, she was informed that the dauphiness was taking a turn in the grounds with her architect and her head gardener. In the apartment of the first story overhead she could hear the noise of a turning lathe with which the dauphin was making a safety-lock for a coffer which he valued very highly.

In order to rejoin the dauphiness Andrée had to cross the parterre, where, notwithstanding the advanced period of the season, flowers carefully covered through the night raised their pale heads to bask in the setting rays of a sun even paler than themselves. And as the evening was already closing in, for in that season it was dark at six o'clock, the gardener's apprentices were employed in placing the bell-glasses over the most delicate plants in each bed.

While traversing a winding alley of evergreens clipped into the form of a hedge, bordered on each side by beds of Bengal roses, and opening on a beautiful lawn, Andrée all at once perceived one of these gardeners, who, when he saw her, raised himself upon his spade, and bowed with a more refined and studied politeness than was usual in one of his station.

She looked, and in this workman recognised Gilbert, whose hands, notwithstanding his labour, were yet white enough to excite the envy of M. de Taverney.

Andrée blushed in spite of herself; it seemed to her that Gilbert's presence in this place was too remarkable a coincidence to be the result of chance.

Gilbert repeated his bow, and Andrée returned it, but without slackening her pace.

"YOU OFFER ME WHAT IS NOT YOURS TO GIVE."

She was too upright and too courageous, however, to resist the promptings of her heart, and leave the question of her restless soul unanswered. She turned back, and Gilbert, whose cheek had already become as pale as death, and whose dark eye followed her retreating steps with a sombre look, felt as if suddenly restored to life, and bounded forwards to meet her.

"You here, M. Gilbert?" said Andrée, coldly.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"By what chance?"

"Mademoiselle, one must live, and live honestly."

"But do you know that you are very fortunate?"

"Oh! yes, mademoiselle, very fortunate," said Gilbert.

"I beg your pardon; what did you say?"

"I said, mademoiselle, that I am, as you think, very fortunate."

"Who introduced you here?"

"M. de Jussieu, a protector of mine."

"Ah!" said Andrée, surprised; "then you know M. de Jussieu?"

"He is the friend of my first protector—of my master, M. Rousseau."

"Courage, then, Monsieur Gilbert," said Andrée, making a movement to proceed.

"Do you find yourself better, mademoiselle?" asked Gilbert, in a trembling voice.

"Better? How so?" said Andrée, coldly.

"Why—the accident?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, Monsieur Gilbert, I am better; it was nothing."

"Oh! you were nearly perishing," said Gilbert, almost speechless with emotion, "the danger was terrible."

Andrée now began to think that it was high time to cut short this interview with a workman in the most public part of the royal park.

"Good-day, Monsieur Gilbert," said she.

"Will mademoiselle not accept a rose?" said Gilbert, trembling, and the drops of perspiration standing on his forehead.

"But, sir," replied Andrée, "you offer me what is not yours to give."

Gilbert, surprised and overwhelmed by this reply, could not utter a word. His head drooped, but as he saw Andrée looking at him with something like a feeling of joy at having manifested her superiority, he drew himself up, tore a branch covered with flowers from the finest of the rose-trees, and began to pull the roses to pieces with a coolness and dignity which surprised and startled the young girl.

She was too just and too kind-hearted not to see that she had gratuitously wounded the feelings of an inferior who had unthinkingly committed a breach of propriety. But like all proud natures who feel themselves in the wrong, she preserved silence when perhaps an apology or a reparation was hovering upon her lips.

Gilbert added not a word either; he threw away the branch and resumed his spade; but his character was a mixture of pride and cunning, and whilst stooping to his work, he kept his eye stealthily fixed on Andrée's retreating figure. At the end of the walk she could not help looking round. She was a woman.

This weakness was sufficient for Gilbert; he said to himself that in this last struggle he had been victorious.

"She is weaker than I am," thought he, "and I shall govern her. Proud of her beauty, of her name, of her advancing fortunes, indignant at my love, which she perhaps suspects, she is only the more an object of adoration to the poor working man who trembles while he looks at her. Oh! this

trembling, this emotion, unworthy of a man! Oh! these acts of cowardice which she makes me commit, she shall one day repay me for them all! But to-day I have worked enough," added he; "I have conquered the enemy. I, who ought to have been the weakest, since I love, have been a hundred times stronger than she."

He repeated these words once more with a wild burst of joy, as he convulsively dashed back the dark hair from his thoughtful brow. Then he stuck his spade deep into the flower-bed, bounded through the hedge of cypress and yew-tree with the speed of a roebuck, and, light as the wind, threaded a parterre of plants under bell glasses, not one of which he touched, notwithstanding the furious rapidity of his career, and posted himself at the extremity of a turn, which he had reached, by describing a diagonal course, before Andrée, who followed the winding of the path.

From his new position he saw her advancing, thoughtful and almost humbled, her lovely eyes cast down, her moist and motionless hand gently rustling her dress as she walked. Concealed behind the thick hedge, Gilbert heard her sigh twice as if she were speaking to herself. At last she passed so close to the trees which sheltered him that had he stretched out his arm he might have touched hers, as a mad and feverish impulse prompted him to do.

But he knit his brow with an energetic movement almost akin to hatred, and, placing his trembling hand upon his heart:

"Coward again!" said he to himself. Then he added softly, "But she is so beautiful!"

Gilbert might have remained for a considerable time sunk in contemplation, for the walk was long and Andrée's step was slow and measured, but this walk was crossed by others, from which some troublesome visitor might at any moment make his appearance, and fate treated Gilbert so scurvily that a man did in fact advance from the first alley upon the left—that is to say, almost opposite the clump of evergreens behind which he was concealed.

This intruder walked with a methodic and measured step; he carried his head erect, held his hat under his right arm, and his left hand resting upon his sword. He wore a velvet coat underneath a pelisse lined with sable fur, and pointed his foot as he walked, which he did with the easy grace of a man of high rank and breeding.

This gentleman as he advanced perceived Andrée, and the young girl's figure evidently pleased him, for he quickened his pace and crossed over in an oblique direction, so as to reach as soon as possible the path on which Andrée was walking and intercept her course.

When Gilbert perceived this personage, he involuntarily gave a slight cry, and took to flight like a startled lapwing. The intruder's manœuvre was successful; he was evidently accustomed to it, and in less than three minutes he was in advance of Andrée, whom three minutes before he had been following at some distance.

When Andrée heard his footstep behind her she moved aside a little to let the man pass, and when he had passed she looked at him in her turn. The gentleman looked also, and most eagerly; he even stopped to see better, and, returning after he had seen her features:

"Ah! mademoiselle," said he, in a very kind voice; "whither are you hastening so quickly, may I ask?"

At the sound of this voice Andrée raised her head, and saw about twenty paces behind her two officers of the guards following slowly; she spied a blue ribbon peeping from beneath the sable pelisse of the person who addressed

her, and pale and startled at this unexpected rencontre, and at being accosted thus graciously, she said, bending very low :

"The king !"

"Mademoiselle——," replied Louis XV., approaching her ; "excuse me, I have such bad eyes that I am obliged to ask your name."

"Mademoiselle de Taverney," stammered the young girl, so confused and trembling that her voice was scarcely audible.

"Oh ! yes ; I remember. I esteem myself fortunate in meeting you in Trianon, mademoiselle," said the king.

"I was proceeding to join her royal highness the dauphiness, who expects me," said Andrée, trembling more and more.

"I will conduct you to her, mademoiselle," replied Louis XV., "for I am just going to pay a visit to my daughter in my quality of country neighbour. Be kind enough to take my arm, as we are proceeding in the same direction."

Andrée felt a cloud pass before her eyes, and the blood flow in tumultuous waves to her heart. In fact, such an honour for the poor girl as the king's arm, the sovereign lord of all France, such an unhoped-for, incredible piece of good fortune, a favour which the whole court might envy, seemed to her more like a dream than a reality.

She made such a deep and reverential curtsey that the king felt himself obliged to bow a second time. When Louis XV. was inclined to remember Louis XIV., it was always in matters of ceremonial and politeness. Such traditions, however, dated further back, and were handed down from Henry IV.

He offered his hand therefore to Andrée, who placed the burning points of her fingers upon the king's glove, and they both continued to advance towards the pavilion, where they had been informed that the dauphiness with her architect and her head gardener would be found.

We can assure the reader that Louis XV., although not particularly fond of walking, chose the longest road to conduct Andrée to the little Trianon. Although the king was apparently unaware of his error, the two officers who walked behind perceived it but too plainly, and bemoaned themselves bitterly, as they were lightly clad and the weather was cold.

They arrived too late to find the dauphiness where they had expected, as Marie Antoinette had just set out for Trianon, that she might not keep the dauphin waiting, for he liked to sup between six and seven o'clock.

Her royal highness arrived therefore at the exact hour, and as the punctual dauphin was already upon the threshold of the saloon that he might lose no time in reaching the dining-room the moment the maître d'hôtel appeared, the dauphiness threw her mantle to a femme-de-chambre, took the dauphin's arm with a winning smile, and drew him into the dining-room.

The table was laid for the two illustrious hosts. They occupied each the centre of the table, so as to leave the place of honour vacant, which, since several unexpected visits of the king, was never occupied in his majesty's absence, even when the room was filled with guests.

At this end of the table, the king's cover and *cadenas* occupied a considerable space ; but the maître d'hotel, not calculating upon it being occupied this evening, was conducting the service on this side.

Behind the dauphiness's chair, leaving the necessary space between for the valets to pass, was stationed Madame de Noailles, stiff and upright, and yet wearing as amiable an expression on her features as she could conjure up for the festive occasion.

Near Madame de Noailles were some other ladies, whose position at the court gave them the right, or merited the privilege, of being present at the supper of their royal highnesses.

Three times a week Madame de Noailles supped at the same table with the dauphin and dauphiness; but on the days when she did not sup with them, she would not for anything in the world have missed being present. Besides, it was a delicate mode of protesting against the exclusion of the four days out of seven.

Opposite the Duchess de Noailles, surnamed by the dauphiness Madame Etiquette, was the Duke de Richelieu, on a raised seat very similar to her own.

He was also a strict observer of forms; but his etiquette was undistinguishable to a casual observer, being always veiled beneath the most perfect elegance and sometimes beneath the wittiest raillery.

The result of this antithesis between the first gentleman of the bedchamber and the first lady of honour of the dauphiness was that the conversation, always dropped by the Duchess de Noailles, was incessantly renewed by M. de Richelieu.

The marshal had travelled through all the courts of Europe, and had adopted the tone of elegance in each which was best suited to his character; so that, from his admirable tact and propriety, he knew exactly what anecdotes to relate at the table of the youthful couple, and what would be suitable to the private suppers of Madame Dubarry.

Perceiving this evening that the dauphiness had a good appetite, and that the dauphin was voracious, he concluded that they would give no heed to the conversation going on around them, and that he had consequently only to make Madame de Noailles suffer an hour of purgatory in anticipation.

He began therefore to speak of philosophy and theatrical affairs, a twofold subject of conversation doubly obnoxious to the venerable duchess. He related the subject of one of the last philanthropic sallies of the philosopher of Ferney, the name already given to the author of the *Henriade*, and when he saw the duchess on the tenterhooks, he changed the text and detailed all the squabbles and disputes which, in his office of gentleman of the chamber, he had to undergo in order to make the actresses in ordinary to the king play more or less badly.

The dauphiness loved the arts, and above all the theatre; she had sent a complete costume for Clytemnestra to Mademoiselle Raucourt, and she therefore listened to M. de Richelieu not only with indulgence but with pleasure.

Then the poor lady of honour, in violation of all etiquette, was forced to fidget on her bench, blow her nose noisily, and shake her venerable head, without thinking of the cloud of powder which at each movement fell upon her forehead, like the cloud of snow which surrounds the summit of Mont Blanc at every gust of the east wind.

But it was not enough to amuse the dauphiness—the dauphin must also be pleased. Richelieu abandoned the subject of the theatre, for which the heir to the crown had never displayed any great partiality, to discourse of humanity and philosophy. When he spoke of the English, he did so with all the warmth and energy which Rousseau displays in drawing the character of Edward Bromston.

Now Madame de Noailles hated the English as much as she did the philosophers. To admit a new idea was a fatiguing operation for her, and fatigue deranged the economy of her whole person. Madame de Noailles,

who felt herself intended by nature for a conserver, growled at all new ideas like a dog at a frightful mask.

Richelieu, in playing this game, had a double end in view; he tormented Madame Etiquette, which evidently pleased the dauphiness, and he threw in, here and there, some virtuous apophthegm, some axiom in mathematics, which was rapturously received by the dauphin, the royal amateur of exact sciences.

He was paying his court, therefore, with great skill and address, and from time to time directing an eager glance towards the door, as if he expected some one who had not yet arrived, when a cry from the foot of the staircase echoed along the arched corridors, was repeated by two valets stationed at regular intervals from the entrance door, and at last reached the dining saloon:

"The king!"

At this magic word Madame de Noailles started bolt upright from her seat, as if moved by a spring; Richelieu rose more slowly, and with easy grace; the dauphin hastily wiped his mouth with his napkin, and stood up before his seat, his face turned towards the door.

As for the dauphiness, she hastened towards the staircase to meet the king, and do the honours of her mansion to him.

CHAPTER XC.

THE QUEEN'S HAIR.

THE king still held Mademoiselle de Taverney by the hand when they reached the landing-place, and it was only on arriving there that he bowed to her, so courteously and so low, that Richelieu had time to see the bow, to admire its grace, and to ask himself to what lucky mortal it was addressed.

His ignorance did not last long. Louis XV. took the arm of the dauphiness, who had seen all that passed, and had already perfectly recognised Andrée.

"My daughter," said he, "I come without ceremony to ask you for my supper. I crossed the entire park in my way hither, and happening to meet Mademoiselle de Taverney," requested her to accompany me."

"Mademoiselle de Taverney!" murmured Richelieu, almost dizzy at this unexpected stroke. "On my faith, I am almost too fortunate!"

"I shall not only be not angry with mademoiselle, who is late," replied the dauphiness graciously, "but I have to thank her for bringing your majesty to us."

Andrée, whose cheeks were dyed with as deep a red as the ripe and tempting cherries which graced the epergne in the centre of the table, bowed without replying.

"Diable! diable! she is indeed beautiful," thought Richelieu; "and that old scoundrel Taverney said no more for her than she deserves."

The king had already taken his seat at the table after having saluted the dauphin. Gifted like his grandfather with an obliging appetite, the monarch did justice to the improvised supper which the maître d'hôtel placed before him as if by magic. But while eating, the king, whose back was turned towards the door, seemed to seek something, or rather some one.

In fact, Mademoiselle de Taverney, who enjoyed no privilege, as her position in the dauphiness's household was not yet fixed, had not entered the dining-room, and after her profound reverence in reply to the king's salutation, had returned to the dauphiness's apartment, lest her services might be required, as they had been once or twice already, to read to her highness after she had retired to bed.

The dauphiness saw that the king was looking for the beautiful companion of his walk.

"M. de Coigny," said she to a young officer of the guards who was standing behind the king, "pray request Mademoiselle de Taverney to come up; with Madame de Noailles' permission, we will discard etiquette for this evening."

M. de Coigny left the room, and almost immediately afterwards returned, introducing Andrée, who, totally at a loss to comprehend the reason for such a succession of unusual favours, entered trembling.

"Seat yourself there, mademoiselle," said the dauphiness, "beside Madame de Noailles."

Andrée mounted timidly on the raised seat, but she was so confused that she had the audacity to seat herself only about a foot distant from the lady of honour. She received, in consequence, such a terrific look that the poor child started back at least four feet, as if she had come in contact with a Leyden jar highly charged.

The king looked at her and smiled.

"Ah! ça," said the duke to himself, "it is scarcely worth my while to meddle with the affair; everything is progressing of itself."

The king turned and perceived the marshal, who was quite prepared to meet his look.

"Good day, duke," said Louis; "do you agree well with the Duchess de Noailles?"

"Sire," replied the marshal, "the duchess always does me the honour to treat me as a madcap."

"Oh! Were you also on the road to Chanteloup, duke?"

"I, sire! Faith, no; I am too grateful for the favours your majesty has showered on my family."

The king did not expect this blow; he was prepared to rally, but he found himself anticipated.

"What favours have I showered, duke?"

"Sire, your majesty has given the command of your light horse to the Duke d'Aiguillon."

"Yes; it is true, duke."

"And that is a step which must have put all the energy, all the skill of your majesty to the task. It is almost a coup-d'état."

The meal was now over; the king waited for a moment, and then rose from table.

The conversation was taking an embarrassing turn, but Richelieu was determined not to let go his prey. Therefore, when the king began to chat with Madame de Noailles, the dauphiness, and Mademoiselle de Taverney, Richelieu manœuvred so skilfully that he soon found himself in the full fire of a conversation which he directed according to his pleasure.

"Sire," said he, "your majesty knows that success emboldens."

"Do you say so for the purpose of informing us that you are bold, duke?"

"Sire, it is for the purpose of requesting a new favour from your majesty, after the one the king has already deigned to grant. One of my best

friends, an old servant of your majesty, has a son in the gendarmes ; the young man is highly deserving, but poor. He has received from an august princess the brevet title of captain, but he has not yet got the company."

"The princess? my daughter?" asked the king, turning towards the dauphiness.

"Yes, sire," said Richelieu, "and the father of this young man is called the Baron de Taverney."

"My father!" involuntarily exclaimed Andrée, "Philip! Is it for Philip, my lord duke, that you are asking for a company?"

Then, ashamed of this breach of etiquette, Andrée made a step backwards, blushing, and clasping her hands with emotion.

The king turned to admire the blush which mantled on the cheek of the lovely girl, and then glanced at Richelieu with a pleased look, which informed the courtier how agreeable his request had been.

"In truth," said the dauphiness, "he is a charming young man, and I had promised to make his fortune. How unfortunate princes are! When God gives them the best intentions, he deprives them of the memory and reasoning powers necessary to carry their intentions into effect. Ought I not to have known that this young man was poor, and that it was not sufficient to give him the epaulette without at the same time giving him the company?"

"Oh, madame! how could your royal highness have known that?"

"Oh, I knew it!" replied the dauphiness quickly, with a gesture which recalled to Andrée's memory the modest but yet happy home of her childhood ; "yes, I knew it, but I thought I had done everything necessary in giving a step to M. Philip de Taverney. He is called Philip, is he not, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, madame."

The king looked round on these noble and ingenuous faces, and then rested his gaze on Richelieu, whose face was also brightened by a ray of generosity, borrowed doubtless from his august neighbour.

"Duke," said he, in a low voice, "I shall embroil myself with Luciennes."

Then, addressing Andrée, he added quickly :

"Say that it will give you pleasure, mademoiselle."

"Ah! sire," said Andrée, clasping her hands, "I request it as a boon from your majesty."

"In that case, it is granted," said Louis. "You will choose a good company for this young man, duke ; I will furnish the necessary funds, if the charges are not already paid and the post vacant."

This good action gladdened all who were present. It procured the king a heavenly smile from Andrée, and Richelieu a warm expression of thanks from those beautiful lips, from which, in his youth, he would have asked for even more.

Several visitors arrived in succession, amongst whom was the Cardinal de Rohan, who since the installation of the dauphiness at Trianon had paid his court assiduously to her.

But during the whole evening the king had kind looks and pleasant words only for Richelieu. He even commanded the marshal's attendance, when, after bidding farewell to the dauphiness, he set out to return to his own Trianon. The old marshal followed the king with a heart bounding with joy.

While the king, accompanied by the duke and his two officers, gained

the dark alleys which lead from the palace, the dauphiness had dismissed Andrée.

"You will be anxious to write this good news to Paris, mademoiselle," said the princess, "you may retire."

And preceded by a footman carrying a lantern, the young girl traversed the walk of about a hundred paces in length which separates Trianon from the offices.

Also, in advance of her, concealed by the thick foliage of the shrubbery, bounded a shadowy figure which followed all her movements with sparkling eyes. It was Gilbert.

When Andrée had arrived at the entrance, and begun to ascend the stone staircase, the valet left her and returned to the antechambers of Trianon.

Then Gilbert, gliding into the vestibule, reached the court-yard, and climbed by a small staircase as steep as a ladder into his attic, which was opposite Andrée's windows and was situated in a corner of the building.

From this position he could see Andrée call a femme-de-chambre of Madame de Noailles to assist her, as that lady had her apartments in the same corridor. But when the girl had entered the room, the window curtains fell like an impenetrable veil between the ardent eyes of the young man and the object of his wishes.

At the palace there now only remained M. de Rohan, redoubling his gallant attentions to the dauphiness, who received them but coldly.

The prelate, fearing at last to be indiscreet, inasmuch as the dauphin had already retired, took leave of her royal highness with the expression of the deepest and most tender respect. As he was entering his carriage, a waiting-woman of the dauphiness approached, and almost leaned inside the door.

"Here," said she.

And she put into his hand a small paper parcel, carefully folded, the touch of which made the cardinal start.

"Here," he replied hastily, thrusting into the girl's hand a heavy purse, the contents of which would have been a handsome salary. Then, without losing time, the cardinal ordered the coachman to drive to Paris, and to ask for fresh orders at the barrier. During the whole way, in the darkness of the carriage, he felt the paper, and kissed the contents like some intoxicated lover. At the barrier he cried, "Rue St. Claude." A short time afterwards he crossed the mysterious courtyard, and once more found himself in the little saloon occupied by Fritz, the silent usher.

Balsamo kept him waiting about a quarter of an hour. At last he appeared, and gave as a reason for his delay the lateness of the hour, which had prevented him from expecting the arrival of visitors.

In fact, it was now nearly eleven o'clock at night.

"That is true, baron," said the cardinal; "and I must request you to excuse my unseasonable visit. But you may remember you told me one day, that to be assured of certain secrets——"

"I must have a portion of the person's hair of whom we were speaking on that day," interrupted Balsamo, who had already spied the little paper which the unsuspecting prelate held carelessly in his hand.

"Precisely, baron."

"And you have brought me this hair, sir; very well."

"Here it is. Do you think it would be possible to return it to me again after the trial?"

"Unless fire should be necessary; in which case——"

"Of course, of course," said the cardinal. "However, I can procure some more. Can I have a reply?"

"To-day?"

"You know I am impatient."

"I must first ascertain, my lord."

And Balsamo took the packet of hair, and hastily mounted to Lorenza's apartment.

"I shall now know," said he, on the way, "the secret of this monarchy: the mysterious fate which destiny has in store for it!"

And from the other side of the wall, even before opening the secret door, he plunged Lorenza into the magnetic sleep. The young girl received him therefore with an affectionate embrace. Balsamo could scarcely extricate himself from her arms. It would be difficult to say which was the most grievous for the poor baron, the reproaches of the beautiful Italian when she was awake, or her caresses when she slept. When he had succeeded in loosening the chain which her snowy arms formed around his neck:

"My beloved Lorenza," said he, putting the paper in her hand, "can you tell me to whom this hair belongs?"

Lorenza took it and pressed it against her breast, and then to her forehaad. Though her eyes were open, it was only by means of her head and breast that she could see in her sleep.

"Oh!" said she, "it is an illustrious head from which this hair has been taken."

"Is it not?—and a happy head too? Speak."

"She may be happy."

"Look well, Lorenza."

"Yes, she may be happy; there is no shadow as yet upon her life."

"Yet she is married."

"Oh!" said Lorenza, with a sigh.

"Well!—what? What means my Lorenza?"

"Strange!" said she, "strange indeed! She is married like myself, pure and spotless as I am; but unlike me, dear Balsamo, she does not love her husband."

"Oh, fate!" said Balsamo. "Thanks, Lorenza, I know all I wished to know."

He embraced her, put the hair carefully into his pocket, and then, cutting a lock off the Italian's black tresses, he burnt it at the wax-light and enclosed the ashes in the paper which had been wrapped round the hair of the dauphiness.

Then he left the room, and whilst descending the stairs he awoke the young woman.

The prelate, agitated and impatient, was waiting and doubting.

"Well, count?" said he.

"Well, my lord, the oracle has said you may hope."

"It said so!" exclaimed the prince, transported with joy.

"Draw what conclusion you please, my lord; the oracle said that this woman did not love her husband."

"Oh!" said M. de Rohan, with a thrill of joy.

"I was obliged to burn the hair to obtain the revelation by its essence. Here are the ashes, which I restore to you most scrupulously, after having gathered them up as if each atom were worth a million."

"Thanks, sir, a thousand thanks; I can never repay you."

"Do not speak of that, my lord. I must recommend you, however, not to swallow these ashes in wine, as lovers sometimes do; it causes such a dangerous sympathy that your love would become incurable, while the lady's heart would cool towards you."

"Oh! I shall take care," said the prelate, almost terrified. "Adieu, count, adieu."

Twenty minutes afterwards his eminence's carriage crossed M. de Richelieu's at the corner of the Rue des Petits Champs so suddenly, that it was nearly upset in a deep trench which had been dug for the foundation of a new building.

The two noblemen recognised each other.

"Ha! prince," said Richelieu with a smile.

"Ha! duke," replied Louis de Rohan, with his finger upon his lips.

And they disappeared in opposite directions.

CHAPTER XCI.

M. DE RICHELIEU APPRECIATES NICOLE.

M. DE RICHELIEU drove straight to M. de Taverney's modest hotel in the Rue Coq-Heron.

Thanks to the privilege we possess, in common with the devil on two sticks, of entering every house, be it ever so carefully locked, we are aware before M. de Richelieu that the baron was seated before the fireplace, his feet resting upon the immense andirons which supported a smouldering log, and was lecturing Nicole, sometimes pausing to chuck her under the chin, in spite of the rebellious and scornful poutings of the young waiting-maid. But whether Nicole would have been satisfied with the care's without the sermon, or whether she would have preferred the sermon without the caress, we can give no satisfactory information.

The conversation between the master and the servant turned upon the very important point, that at a certain hour of the evening Nicole never came when the bell was rung; that she had always something to do in the garden or in the greenhouse; and that everywhere but in these two places she neglected her business.

Nicole, turning backwards and forwards with a charming and voluptuous grace, replied:

"So much the worse! I am dying with weariness here; you promised I should go to Trianon with mademoiselle."

It was thereupon that the baron thought it proper in charity to pat her cheeks and chuck her chin, no doubt to distract her thoughts from dwelling on so unpleasant a subject; but Nicole continued in the same vein, and, refusing all consolation, deplored her unhappy lot.

"Yes," sighed she, "I am shut up within four horrible walls; I have no company; I have no air; whilst I had the prospect of a pleasant and fortunate future before me."

"What prospect?" said the baron.

"Trianon," replied Nicole; "Trianon, where I should have seen the world—where I should have looked about me—where I should have been looked at."

"Oh! oh! my little Nicole," said the baron.

"Well, sir, I am a woman, and as well worth looking at as another, I suppose?"

"Cordieu! how she talks," said the baron to himself. "What fire! what ambition!"

And he could not help casting a look of admiration at so much youth and beauty. Nicole seemed at times thoughtful and impatient.

"Come, sir," said she, "will you retire to bed, that I may go to mine!"

"One word more, Nicole."

All at once the noise of the street-bell made Taverney start and Nicole jump.

"Who can be coming," said the baron, "at half-past eleven o'clock at night? Go, child, and see."

Nicole hastened to open the door, asked the name of the visitor, and left the street-door half open. Through this lucky opening a shadow, which had apparently emerged from the courtyard, glided out, not without making noise enough to attract the attention of the marshal, for it was he who turned and saw the flight. Nicole preceded him, candle in hand, with a beaming look.

"Oh! oh!" said the marshal, smiling, and following her into the room, "this old rogue of a Taverney only spoke to me of his daughter."

The duke was one of those men who do not require a second glance to see, and see completely. The shadowy figure which he had observed escaping made him think of Nicole, and Nicole of the shadow. When he saw her pretty face, he guessed what errand the shadow had come upon, and, judging from her saucy and laughing eye, her white teeth, and small waist, he drew a tolerably correct picture of her character and tastes.

At the door of the saloon, Nicole, not without a palpitation of the heart, announced:

"His lordship the Duke de Richelieu."

This name was destined to cause a sensation that evening. It produced such an effect upon the baron, that he rose from his arm-chair and walked straight to the door, not being able to believe the evidence of his ears.

But before he reached the door, he perceived M. de Richelieu in the shadow of the corridor.

"The duke!" he stammered.

"Yes, my dear friend, the duke himself," replied Richelieu, in his most whining voice. "Oh! that surprises you, after your visit the other day? Well, nevertheless, nothing can be more real. In the meantime, your hand, if you please."

"My lord duke, you overwhelm me."

"Where have your wits fled to, my dear friend?" said the old marshal, giving his hat and cane to Nicole, and seating himself comfortably in an arm-chair, "you are getting rusty, you dote; you seem no longer to know the world!"

"But yet, duke," replied Taverney, much agitated, "it seems to me that the reception you gave me the other day was so significant that I could not mistake its purport."

"Hark ye, my old friend," answered Richelieu, "the other day you behaved like a school-boy and I like a pedant. Between us there was only the difference of the ferula. You are going to speak—I will save you the trouble; you might very probably say some very foolish things to me, and I might reply in the same vein. Let us leave the other day aside, therefore, and come direct to the present time. Do you know what I have come for this evening?"

"No, certainly."

"I have come to bring you the company which you asked me for your son the other day, and which the king has granted. Diable! can you not understand the difference? The day before yesterday I was a quasi-minister, and to ask a favour was an injustice; but to-day, when I am simply Richelieu and have refused the portfolio, it would be absurd not to ask; I have therefore asked and obtained, and I now bring it to you."

"Duke, can this be true? And is this kindness on your part——?"

"It is the natural consequence of my duty as your friend. The minister refused, Richelieu asks and gives."

"Ah, duke, you enchant me—you are a true friend!"

"Pardieu!"

"But the king—the king, who confers such a favour on me——"

"The king scarcely knows what he has done; or perhaps I am mistaken, and he knows very well."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that his majesty has, no doubt, some motive for provoking Madame Dubarry just now; and you owe this favour which he bestows upon you more to that motive than to my influence."

"You think so?"

"I am certain of it, for I am aiding and abetting. You know it is on account of this creature that I refused the portfolio?"

"I was told so, but——"

"But you did not believe it. Come, say it frankly."

"Well, I confess that——"

"You always thought me not likely to be troubled by many scruples of conscience—is that it?"

"At least, that I thought you without prejudices."

"My friend, I am getting old, and I no longer care for pretty faces except when they can be useful to me. And besides I have some other plans. But, to return to your son; he is a splendid fellow!"

"But on bad terms with that Dubarry who was at your house when I had the folly to present myself."

"I am aware of it, and that is why I am not a minister."

"Oh! you refused the portfolio in order not to displease my son?"

"If I told you so you would not believe me. No, that is not the reason. I refused it because the requirements of the Dubarrys, which commenced with the exclusion of your son, would have ended in enormities of all kinds."

"Then you have quarrelled with these creatures?"

"Yes and no. They fear me—I despise them; it is tit for tat."

"It is heroic, but imprudent."

"Why?"

"The countess has still some power."

"Pooh!" said Richelieu.

"How you say that!"

"I say it like a man who feels the weakness of his position, and who, if necessary, would place the miner in a good position to blow up the whole place."

"I see the true state of the case; you do my son a favour partly to vex the Dubarrys."

"Principally for that reason, and your perspicacity is not at fault. Your son serves me as a grenade; I shall cause an explosion by his means. But, apropos, baron, have you not also a daughter?"

"Yes."

"Young—lovely as Venus—and who lives at present at Trianon?"

"Ah! then you know her?"

"I have spent the evening in her company, and have conversed about her for a full hour with the king."

"With the king?" cried Taverney, his cheeks in a flame. "The king has spoken of my daughter—of Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney?"

"The king himself, my friend. Do I vex you in telling you this?"

"Vex me? No, certainly not. The king honours me by looking at my daughter—but—the king——"

"Is immoral; is that what you were going to say?"

"Heaven forbid that I should talk evil of his majesty. He has a right to adopt whatever morals he chooses."

"Well! what does this astonishment mean, then? Do you pretend to say that Mademoiselle Andrée is not an accomplished beauty, and that therefore the king may not have looked upon her with admiration?"

Taverney did not reply; he only shrugged his shoulders and fell into a reverie, during which the unrelenting inquisitorial eye of the Duke de Richelieu was still fixed upon him.

"Well, I guess what you would say, if, instead of thinking to yourself, you would speak aloud," continued the old marshal, approaching his chair nearer the baron's. "You would say that the king is accustomed to bad society, that he mixes with low company, and that therefore he is not likely to admire this noble girl, so modest in her demeanour and so pure and lofty in her ideas, and is not capable of appreciating the treasures of her grace and beauty."

"Certainly, you are a great man, duke; you have guessed my thoughts exactly," said Taverney.

"But confess, baron," continued Richelieu, "that our master should no longer force us gentlemen, peers and companions of the King of France, to kiss the vile, open hand of a creature like Dubarry. It is time that he should restore us to our proper position. After having sunk from La Chateauroux, who was a marquise and of stuff to make duchesses, to La Pompadour, who was the daughter and the wife of a farmer of the public revenues, and from La Pompadour to the Dubarry, who calls herself simply Jeanneton, may he not fall still farther and plunge us into the lowest pitch of degradation? It is humiliating for us, baron, who wear a coronet on our caps, to bow the head before such trumpery creatures."

"Oh! you only speak the truth," said Taverney. "How evident is it that the court is deserted on account of these new fashions!"

"No queen, no ladies; no ladies, no courtiers. The king elevates a grisette to the rank of a consort, and the people are upon the throne, represented by Mademoiselle Jeanne Vaubernier, a sempstress of Paris."

"It is so, and yet——"

"You see then, baron," interrupted the marshal, "what a noble career there is open for a woman of mind who should reign over France at present."

"Without doubt," said Taverney, whose heart was beating fast; "but unluckily the place is occupied."

"For a woman," continued the marshal, "who would have the boldness of these creatures without their vice, and who would direct her views and calculations to a loftier aim. For a woman who would advance her fortune so high, that she should be talked of when the monarchy itself should no longer exist. Do you know if your daughter has intellect, baron?"

"Lofty intellect, and above all, good sense."

"She is very lovely."

"Is she not?"

"Her beauty is of that soft and charming character which pleases men so much, while her whole being is stamped with that air of candour and virgin purity which imposes respect even upon women. You must take great care of that treasure, my old friend."

"You speak of her with such fire——"

"I! I am madly in love with her, and would marry her to-morrow were I twenty instead of seventy-four years of age! But is she comfortably placed? Has she the luxury which befits such a lovely flower? Only think, baron! this evening she returned alone to her apartments, without waiting-women or lackey. A servant of the dauphin carried a lantern before her! That looks more like a servant than a lady of her rank."

"What can I do, duke? you know I am not rich."

"Rich or not, your daughter must at least have a waiting-maid."

Taverney sighed.

"I know very well," said he, "that she wants one, or at least, that she ought to have one."

"Well! have you none?"

The baron did not reply.

"Who is that pretty girl you had here just now?" continued Richelieu. "A fine spirited looking girl, i'faith."

"Yes, but—I—I cannot send her to Trianon."

"Why not, baron? On the contrary, she seems to me perfectly suited for the post; she would make a capital femme-de-chambre."

"You did not look at her face then, duke?"

"I!—I did nothing else."

"You looked at her and did not remark her strange resemblance!"

"To whom?"

"To—guess. Come hither, Nicole."

Nicole advanced; like a true waiting-woman, she had been listening at the door. The duke took her by both hands and looked her steadily in the face, but the impertinent gaze of this great lord and debauchee did not alarm or embarrass her for a moment.

"Yes," said he, "it is true; there is a resemblance."

"You know to whom, and you see therefore that it is impossible to expose the fortunes of our house to such an awkward trick of fate. Would it be thought agreeable that this little minx of a Nicole should resemble the most illustrious lady in France?"

"Oh, ho!" replied Nicole, sharply, and disengaging herself from the marshal's grasp the better to reply to M. de Taverney, "is it so certain that this little minx resembles this illustrious lady so exactly? Has this lady the low shoulder, the quick eye, the round ankle, and the plump arm of the little minx?"

Nicole was crimson with rage, and therefore ravishingly beautiful.

The duke once more took her pretty hands in his, and with a look full of caresses and promises:

"Baron," said he, "Nicole has certainly not her equal at court, at least in my opinion. As for the illustrious lady to whom she has, I confess, a slight resemblance, we shall know how to spare her self-love. You have fair hair of a lovely shade, Mademoiselle Nicole; you have eyebrows and nose of a most imperial form; well, in one quarter of an hour employed before the mirror, these imperfections, since the baron thinks

them such, will disappear. Nicole, my child, would you like to be at Trianon?"

"Oh!" said Nicole, and her whole soul full of longing was expressed in this monosyllable.

"You shall go to Trianon, then, my dear, and without prejudicing in any way the fortunes of others. Baron, one word more."

"Speak, my dear duke."

"Go, my pretty child," said Richelieu, "and leave us alone a moment."

Nicole retired. The duke approached the baron.

"I press you the more to send your daughter a waiting-maid, because it will please the king. His majesty does not like poverty, and pretty faces do not frighten him. Let me alone, I understand what I am about."

"Nicole shall go to Trianon, if you think it will please the king," replied the baron, with a meaning smile.

"Then, if you will allow me, I will bring her with me; she can take advantage of the carriage."

"But still, her resemblance to the dauphiness! We must think of that, duke."

"I have thought of it. This resemblance will disappear in a quarter of an hour under Raffe's hands, I will answer for it. Write a note to your daughter to tell her of what importance it is that she should have a femme-de-chambre, and that this femme-de-chambre should be Nicole."

"You think it important that it should be Nicole."

"I do."

"And that no other than Nicole would do?"

"Upon my honour, I think so."

"Then I will write immediately."

And the baron sat down and wrote a letter, which he handed to Richelieu.

"And the instructions, duke?"

"I will give them to Nicole. Is she intelligent?"

The baron smiled.

"Then you confide her to me, do you not?" said Richelieu.

"That is your affair, duke; you asked me for her, I give her to you; make of her what you like."

"Mademoiselle, come with me," said the duke, rising and calling into the corridor, "and that quickly."

Nicole did not wait to be told twice. Without asking the baron for his consent, she made up a packet of clothes in five minutes, and light as a bird, she flew downstairs and took her place beside the coachman.

Richelieu took leave of his friend, who repeated his thanks for the service he had rendered Philip. Of Andrée not a word was said; it was necessary to do more than speak of her.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE TRANSFORMATION.

NICOLE was overjoyed. To leave Taverney for Paris was not half so great a triumph as to leave Paris for Trianon. She was so gracious with M. de Richelieu's coachman, that the next morning the reputation of the new femme-de-chambre was established throughout all the coach-houses and antechambers, in any degree aristocratic, of Paris and Versailles.

When they arrived at the Hôtel de Hanover, M. de Richelieu took the little waiting-maid by the hand and led her to the first story, where M. Raffe was waiting his arrival, and writing a multitude of letters, all on his master's account.

Amidst the various acquirements of the marshal, war occupied the foremost rank, and Raffe had become, at least in theory, such a skilful man of war, that Polybius and the Chevalier de Fobard, if they had lived at that period, would have esteemed themselves fortunate could they have perused the pamphlets on fortifications and manœuvring, of which Raffe wrote one every week. M. Raffe was busy revising the plan of a war against the English in the Mediterranean when the marshal entered, and said :

"Raffe, look at this child, will you?"

Raffe looked.

"Very pretty," said he, with a most significant movement of the lips.

"Yes, but the likeness, Raffe? It is of the likeness I speak."

"Oh! true. What the deuce!"

"You see it, do you not?"

"It is extraordinary ; it will either make or mar her fortune."

"It will ruin her in the first place ; but we shall arrange all that. You observe she has fair hair, Raffe ; but that will not signify much, will it?"

"It will only be necessary to make it black, my lord," replied Raffe, who had acquired the habit of completing his master's thoughts, and sometimes even of thinking entirely for him.

"Come to my dressing-table, child," said the marshal, "this gentleman, who is a very clever man, will make you the handsomest and the least easily recognised waiting-maid in France."

In fact, ten minutes afterwards, with the assistance of a composition which the marshal used every week to dye the white hairs beneath his wig black, a piece of coquetry which he often affected to confess by the bedside of some of his acquaintances, Raffe had dyed the beautiful auburn hair of Nicole a splendid jet black.

Then he passed the end of a pin, blackened in the flame of a candle, over her thick fair eyebrows, and by this means gave such a fantastic look to her joyous countenance, such an ardent and even sombre fire to her bright clear eyes, that one would have said she was some fairy bursting by the power of an incantation from the magic prison in which her enchanter had held her confined.

"Now, my sweet child," said Richelieu, after having handed a mirror to the astonished Nicole, "look how charming you are, and how little like the Nicole you were just now. You have no longer a queen to fear, but a fortune to make."

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed the young girl.

"Yes, and for that purpose it is only necessary that we understand each other."

Nicole blushed and looked down ; the cunning one expected, no doubt, some of those flattering words which Richelieu knew so well how to say.

The duke perceived this, and, to cut short all misunderstanding, said :

"Sit down in this arm-chair beside M. Raffe, my dear child. Open your ears wide, and listen to me. Oh! do not let M. Raffe's presence embarrass you ; do not be afraid ; he will, on the contrary, give us his advice. You are listening, are you not?"

"Yes, my lord," stammered Nicole, ashamed at having thus been led away by her vanity.

The conversation between M. de Richelieu, M. Raffe, and Nicole lasted

more than an hour, after which the marshal sent the little femme-de-chambre to sleep with the other waiting-women in the hotel.

Raffe returned to his military pamphlet, and Richelieu retired to bed, after having looked over the different letters which conveyed to him intelligence of all the acts of the provincial parliaments against M. d'Aiguillon and the Dubarry clique.

Early the next day, one of his carriages without his coat of arms conducted Nicole to Trianon, set her down at the gate with her little packet, and immediately disappeared. Nicole, with head erect, mind at ease, and hope dancing in her eyes, after having made the necessary inquiries, knocked at the door of the offices.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. Andrée, already up and dressed, was writing to her father to inform him of the happy event of the preceding day, of which M. de Richelieu, as we have already seen, had made himself the messenger. Our readers will not have forgotten that a flight of stone steps led from the garden to the little chapel of Trianon; that on the landing-place of this chapel a staircase branched off towards the right to the first story, which contained the apartments of the ladies-in-waiting, which apartments opened off a long corridor, like an alley, looking upon the garden.

Andrée's apartment was the first upon the left hand in this corridor. It was tolerably large, well-lighted by windows looking upon the stable court, and preceded by a little bedroom with a closet on either side. This apartment, however insufficient, if one considers the ordinary household of the officers of a brilliant court, was yet a charming retreat, very habitable, and very cheerful as an asylum from the noise and bustle of the palace. There an ambitious soul could fly to devour the affronts or the mistakes of the day, and there, too, an humble and melancholy spirit could repose in silence and in solitude, apart from the grandeur of the gay world around.

In fact, the stone steps once ascended and the chapel passed, there no longer existed either superiority, duty, or display. There reigned the calm of a convent, and the personal liberty of prison life. The slave of the palace was a monarch when she had crossed the threshold of her modest dwelling. A gentle yet lofty soul such as Andrée's found consolation in this reflection; not that she flew here to repose after the fatigues of a disappointed ambition, or of unsatisfied longings; but she felt that she could think more at her ease in the narrow bounds of her chamber than in the rich saloons of Trianon, or those marble halls which her feet trod with a timidity amounting almost to terror.

From this sequestered nook, where the young girl felt herself so well and so appropriately placed, she could look without emotion on all the splendour which, during the day, had met her dazzled eye. Surrounded by her flowers, her harpsichord, and her German books—such sweet companions to those who read with the heart—Andrée defied fate to inflict on her a single grief, or to deprive her of a single joy.

"Here," said she, when in the evening, after her duties were over, she returned to throw around her shoulders her dressing-gown with its wide folds, and to breathe with all her soul, as with all her lungs; "here I possess nearly everything I can hope to possess till my death. I may one day perhaps be richer, but I can never be poorer than I now am. There will always be flowers, music, and a consoling page to cheer the poor recluse."

Andrée had obtained permission to breakfast in her own apartment when she felt inclined. This was a precious boon to her, for she could thus

remain in her own domicile until twelve o'clock, unless the dauphiness should command her attendance for some morning reading or some early walk. Thus free, in fine weather she set out every morning with a book in her hand, and traversed alone the extensive woods which lie between Versailles and Trianon; then, after a walk of two hours, during which she gave full play to meditation and reverie, she returned to breakfast, often without having seen either nobleman or servant, man or livery.

When the heat began to pierce through the thick foliage, Andrée had her little chamber fresh and cool with the double current of air from the door and the window. A small sofa covered with Indian silk, four chairs to match, a simple yet elegant bed with a circular top, from which the curtains of the same material as the covering of the furniture fell in deep folds, two china vases placed upon the chimneypiece, and a square table with brass feet, composed her little world, whose narrow confines bounded all her hopes and limited all her wishes.

Andrée was seated in her apartment, therefore, as we have said, and busily engaged in writing to her father, when a little modest knock at the door of the corridor attracted her attention.

She raised her head on seeing the door open, and uttered a slight cry of astonishment when the radiant face of Nicole appeared, entering from the little antechamber.

CHAPTER XCIII.

HOW PLEASURE TO SOME IS DESPAIR TO OTHERS.

"GOOD-DAY, mademoiselle, it is I," said Nicole, with a joyous curtsey, which nevertheless, from the young girl's knowledge of her mistress's character, was not unmixed with anxiety.

"You! And how do you happen to be here?" replied Andrée, putting down her pen, the better to follow the conversation which was thus commenced.

"Mademoiselle had forgotten me, so I came——"

"But if I forgot you, mademoiselle, it was because I had my reasons for so doing. Who gave you permission to come?"

"Monsieur the baron, of course, mademoiselle," said Nicole, smoothing the handsome black eyebrows which she owed to the generosity of M. Raffe with a very dissatisfied air.

"My father requires your services in Paris, and I do not require you here at all. You may return, child."

"Oh, then, mademoiselle does not care—I thought mademoiselle had been more pleased with me. It is well worth while loving," added Nicole, philosophically, "to meet with such a return at last."

And she did her utmost to bring a tear to her beautiful eyes.

There was enough of heart and feeling in this reproach to excite Andrée's compassion.

"My child," said she, "I have attendance here already, and I cannot permit myself unnecessarily to increase the household of the dauphiness by another mouth."

"Oh! as if this mouth was so large!" said Nicole, with a charming smile.

"No matter, Nicole, your presence here is impossible."

"On account of this resemblance?" said the young girl. "Then you have not looked at my face, mademoiselle?"

"In fact, you seem changed."

"I think so! A fine gentleman, he who got the promotion for M. Philip, came to us yesterday, and as he saw the baron quite melancholy at your being here without a waiting-maid, he told him that nothing was easier than to change me from fair to dark. He brought me with him, dressed me as you see, and here I am."

Andrée smiled.

"You must love me very much," said she, "since you are determined at all risks to shut yourself up in Trianon, where I am almost a prisoner."

Nicole cast a rapid but intelligent glance round the room.

"The chamber is not very gay," said she, "but you are not always in it?"

"I? Of course not," replied Andrée; "but you?"

"Well, I?"

"You, who will never enter the saloons of madame the dauphiness; you, who will have neither the resource of the theatre, nor the walk, nor the evening circle, but will always remain here—you will die of weariness."

"Oh!" said Nicole, "there is always some little window or other; one can surely see some little glimpse of the gay world without, were it only through the chinks of the door. If a person can see, they can also be seen—that is all I require; so do not be uneasy on my account."

"I repeat, Nicole, that I cannot receive you without express orders fro... my father."

"Is that your settled determination?"

"It is."

Nicole drew the Baron de Taverney's letter from her bosom.

"There," said she, "since my entreaties and my devotion to you have had no effect, let us see if the order contained in this will have more power."

Andrée read the letter, which was in the following terms:

"I am aware, and indeed it is already remarked, my dear Andrée, that you do not occupy the position at Trianon which your rank imperatively requires. You ought to have two femmes-de-chambre and a valet, as I ought to have clear twenty thousand pounds per annum; but as I am satisfied with one thousand pounds, imitate my example, and content yourself with Nicole, who in her own person is worth all the servants you ought to have.

"Nicole is quick, intelligent, and devoted to you, and will readily adopt the tone and manners of her new locality. Your chief care indeed will be not to stimulate her, but to repress her anxiety. Keep her, then; and do not imagine that I am making any sacrifice in depriving myself of her services. In case you should think so, remember that his majesty, who had the goodness to think of us, remarked on seeing you (this was confided to me by a good friend), that you required a little more attention to your toilet and general appearance. Think of this; it is of great importance.

"YOUR AFFECTIONATE FATHER."

This letter threw Andrée into a state of grief and perplexity. She was then to be haunted, even in her new prosperity, by the remembrance of that poverty which she alone did not feel to be a fault, while all around seemed to consider it as a crime.

Her first impulse was to break her pen indignantly, to tear the letter she had commenced, and to reply to her father's epistle by some lofty tirade expressive of philosophical self-denial, which Philip would have approved of with all his heart. But she imagined she saw the baron's satirical smile on reading this chef d'œuvre, and her resolution vanished. She merely replied to the baron's order, therefore, by a paragraph annexed to the news of Trianon which she had already written to him according to his request.

"My father," she added, "Nicole has this moment arrived, and I receive her, since you wish it; but what you have written on this subject has vexed me. Shall I be less ridiculous with this village girl as waiting-maid, than when I was alone amidst this wealthy court? Nicole will be unhappy at seeing me humbled; she will be discontented: for servants feel proud or humbled in proportion to the wealth or poverty of their masters. As to his majesty's remark, my father, permit me to tell you that the king has too much good sense to be displeased at my incapacity to play the grand lady, and, besides, his majesty has too much heart to have remarked or criticised my poverty without transforming it into a wealth to which your name and services would have had a legitimate claim in the eyes of all."

This was Andrée's reply, and it must be confessed that her ingenuous innocence, her noble pride, had an easy triumph over the cunning and corruption of her tempters.

Andrée said no more respecting Nicole. She agreed to her remaining, so that the latter, joyous and animated, she well knew why, prepared on the spot a little bed in the cabinet on the right of the antechamber, and made herself as small, as aerial, and as exquisite as possible, in order not to inconvenience her mistress by her presence in this modest retreat. One would have thought she wished to imitate the rose-leaf which the Persian sages let fall upon a vase filled with water to show that something could be added without spilling the contents.

Andrée set out for Trianon about one o'clock. She had never been more quickly or more gracefully attired. Nicole had surpassed herself; politeness, attention, and zeal—nothing had been wanting in her services.

When Mademoiselle de Taverney was gone, Nicole felt herself mistress of the domicile, and instituted a thorough examination of it. Everything was scrutinized, from the letters to the smallest knick-knack on the toilet-table, from the mantelpiece to the most secret corners of the closets. Then she looked out of the windows to take a survey of the neighbourhood.

Below her was a large court-yard, in which several ostlers were dressing and currying the splendid horses of the dauphiness. Ostlers! pshaw! Nicole turned away her head.

On the right was a row of windows on the same story as those of Andrée's apartment. Several heads appeared at these windows, apparently those of chambermaids and floor-scrubbers. Nicole disdainfully proceeded in her examination.

On the opposite side, in a large apartment, some music-teachers were drilling a class of choristers and instrumentalists for the mass of St. Louis. Without ceasing her dusting operations, Nicole commenced to sing after her own fashion, thus distracting the attention of the masters, and causing the choristers to sing false.

But this pastime could not long satisfy Mademoiselle Nicole's ambition. When the masters and the singers had quarrelled, and been mystified sufficiently, the little waiting-maid proceeded to the inspection of the

higher story. All the windows were closed, and, moreover, they were only attics, so Nicole continued her dusting. But a moment afterwards, one of these attic windows was opened without her being able to discover by what mechanism, for no one appeared. Some person however must have opened this window; this some person must have seen Nicole and yet not have remained to look at her, thereby proving himself a most impertinent some person. At least, such was Nicole's opinion. But she, who examined everything so conscientiously, could not avoid examining the features of this impertinent; and she therefore returned every moment from her different avocations to the window to give a glance at this attic—that is, at this open eye from which the eyeball was so obstinately absent. Once she imagined that the person fled as she approached; but this was incredible, and she did not believe it.

On another occasion she was almost certain of the fact, having seen the back of the fugitive, surprised, no doubt, by a prompter return than he had anticipated. Then Nicole had recourse to stratagem. She concealed herself behind the curtain, leaving the window wide open to drown all suspicion.

She waited a long time, but at last a head of black hair made its appearance; then came two timid hands, which supported, buttress like, a body bending over cautiously; and, finally, a face showed itself distinctly at the window. Nicole almost fell, and grasped the curtain so tightly, in her surprise, that it shook from top to bottom.

It was Monsieur Gilbert's face which was looking at her from this lofty attic. But the moment Gilbert saw the curtain move, he comprehended the trick, and appeared no more. To mend the matter, the attic window was closed.

No doubt Gilbert had seen Nicole; he had been astonished, and had wished to convince himself of the presence of his enemy; and when he found himself discovered instead, he had fled in agitation and in anger. At least, Nicole interpreted the scene thus, and she was right, for this was the exact state of the case.

In fact, Gilbert would rather have seen his Satanic majesty in person than Nicole. The arrival of this spy caused him a thousand terrors. He felt an old leaven of jealousy against her, for she knew his secret of the garden in the Rue Coq-Heron.

Gilbert had fled in agitation, but not in agitation alone, but also in anger, and biting his nails with rage.

"Of what use now is my foolish discovery, of which I was so proud?" said he to himself. "Even if Nicole had a lover in Paris, the evil is done, and she will not be sent away from this on that account; but if she tells what I did in the Rue Coq-Heron, I shall be dismissed from Trianon. It is not I who govern Nicole—it is she who governs me. Oh, fury!"

And Gilbert's inordinate self-love, serving as a stimulant to his hatred, made his blood boil with frightful violence. It seemed to him that Nicole, in entering that apartment, had chased from it, with a diabolical smile, all the happy dreams which Gilbert from his garret had wafted thither every night along with his vows, his ardent love, and his flowers. Had Gilbert been too much occupied to think of Nicole before, or had he banished the subject from his thoughts on account of the terror with which it inspired him? We cannot determine; but this we do know, at least, that Nicole's appearance was a most disagreeable surprise for him.

He saw plainly that, sooner or later, war would be declared between them; but, as Gilbert was prudent and politic, he did not wish the war

to commence until he felt himself strong enough to make it energetic and effective. With this intention he determined to counterfeit death until chance should present him with a favourable opportunity of reviving, or until Nicole, from weakness or necessity, should venture on some step which would deprive her of her present vantage-ground. Therefore, all eye, all ear, when Andrée was concerned, but at the same time ceaselessly vigilant, he continued to make himself acquainted with the state of affairs in the first apartment of the corridor, without Nicole ever having once met him in the gardens.

Unluckily for Nicole, she was not irreproachable, and even had she been so for the present, there was always one stumbling-block in the past over which she could be made to fall.

At the end of a week's ceaseless watching, morning, noon, and night, Gilbert at last saw through the bars of his window a plume which he fancied he recognised. This plume was a source of constant agitation to Nicole, for it belonged to M. Beausire, who, following the rest of the court, had emigrated from Paris to Trianon.

For a long time Nicole was cruel; for a long time she left M. Beausire to shiver in the cold, and melt in the sun, and her prudence drove Gilbert to despair; but one fine morning, when M. Beausire had, doubtless, overleaped the barrier of mimic eloquence, and found an opportunity of bringing persuasive words to his aid, Nicole profited by Andrée's absence to descend to the court-yard and join M. Beausire, who was assisting his friend, the superintendent of the stables, to train a little Shetland pony.

From the court they passed into the garden, and from thence into the shady avenue which leads to Versailles. Gilbert followed the amorous couple with the ferocious joy of a tiger who scents his prey. He counted their steps, their sighs, learned by heart all he heard of their conversation, and it may be presumed that the result pleased him, for the next day, freed from all embarrassment, he displayed himself openly at his attic window, humming a song and looking quite at ease, and so far from fearing to be seen by Nicole, that, on the contrary, he seemed to brave her look.

Nicole was mending an embroidered silken mitten belonging to her mistress; she heard the song, raised her head, and saw Gilbert. The first evidence she gave of his presence was a contemptuous pouting, which bordered on the bitter, and breathed of hostility at a league's distance. But Gilbert sustained this look with such a singular smile, and there was such provoking intelligence in his air and in his manner of singing, that Nicole looked down and blushed.

"She understands me," thought Gilbert; "that is all I wished." On subsequent occasions Gilbert continued the same behaviour, and it was now Nicole's turn to tremble. She went so far as to long for an interview with him, in order to free her heart from the load with which the satirical looks of the young gardener had burthened it.

Gilbert saw that she sought him. He could not misunderstand the short dry coughs which sounded near the window whenever Nicole knew him to be in his attic, nor the goings and comings of the young girl in the corridor when she supposed he might be ascending or descending the stairs. For a short time he was very proud of this triumph, which he attributed entirely to his strength of character and wise precautions. Nicole watched him so well that once she spied him as he mounted to his attic. She called him, but he did not reply.

Prompted either by curiosity or fear, Nicole went still farther. One

evening she took off her pretty high-heeled slippers, a present from Andrée, and with a trembling and hurried step she ventured into the corridor, at the end of which she saw Gilbert's door. There was still sufficient daylight to enable Gilbert, aware of Nicole's approach, to see her distinctly through the joining, or rather through the crevices of the panels. She knocked at the door, knowing well that he was in his room, but Gilbert did not reply.

It was, nevertheless, a dangerous temptation for him. He could, at his ease, humble her who thus came to entreat his pardon, and prompted by this thought, he had already raised his hand to draw the bolt which, with his habitual precaution and vigilance, he had fastened to avoid surprise.

"But no," thought he, "no. She is all calculation; it is from fear or interest alone that she comes to seek me. She therefore hopes to gain something by her visit; but if so, what may I not lose?"

And with this reasoning he let his hand fall again by his side. Nicole, after having knocked at the door two or three times, retired, frowning. Gilbert therefore kept all his advantage, and Nicole had only to redouble her cunning in order not to lose hers entirely. At last all these projects and counter-projects reduced themselves to this dialogue, which took place between the belligerent parties one evening at the chapel door, where chance had brought them together.

"Ha! good evening, Monsieur Gilbert; you are here then, are you?"

"Oh! good evening, Mademoiselle Nicole; you are at Trianon?"

"As you see—waiting-maid to mademoiselle."

"And I am assistant gardener."

Then Nicole made a deep curtsey to Gilbert, who returned her a most courtly bow, and they separated. Gilbert ascended to his attic as if he had been on his way thither, and Nicole left the offices, and proceeded on her errand; but Gilbert glided down again stealthily, and followed the young femme-de-chambre, calculating that she was going to meet M. Beausire.

A man was indeed waiting for her beneath the shadows of the alley; Nicole approached him. It was too dark for Gilbert to recognise M. Beausire; and the absence of the plume puzzled him so much, that he let Nicole return to her domicile, and followed the man as far as the gate of Trianon.

It was not M. Beausire, but a man of a certain age, or rather certainly aged, with a distinguished air, and a brisk gait, notwithstanding his advanced years. When he approached, Gilbert, who carried his assurance so far as almost to brush past him, recognised M. de Richelieu.

"Peste!" said he, "first an officer, now a marshal of France! Mademoiselle Nicole ascends in the scale."

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE PARLIAMENTS.

WHILE all these minor intrigues, hatched and brought to light beneath the linden-trees and amidst the alleys of Trianon, formed a sufficiently animated existence for the insects of this little world, the great intrigues of the town, like threatening tempests, spread their vast wings over the palace of Themis, as M. Jean Dubarry wrote in mythological parlance to his sister.

The parliaments, those degenerate remains of the ancient French oppo-

sition, had taken breath beneath the capricious government of Louis XV.; but since their protector, M. de Choiseul, had fallen, they felt the approach of danger, and they prepared to meet it by measures as energetic as their circumstances would permit.

Every general commotion is kindled at first by some personal quarrel, as the pitched battles of armies commence by skirmishes of outposts. Since M. de la Chalotais had attacked M. d'Aiguillon, and in so doing had personified the struggle of the tiers-état with the feudal lords, the public mind had taken possession of the question, and would not permit it to be deferred or displaced.

Now the king—whom the parliament of Brittany and of all France had deluged with a flood of petitions, more or less submissive and foolish—the king, thanks to Madame Dubarry, had just given his countenance to the feudal against the tiers party, by nominating M. d'Aiguillon to the command of his light horse.

M. Jean Dubarry had described it very correctly; it was a smart flip to "the dear and trusty counsellors, sitting in high court of parliament."

"How would the blow be taken?" Town and court asked itself this question every morning at sunrise; but members of parliament are clever people, and where others are much embarrassed they see clearly. They began with agreeing among themselves as to the application and the result of this blow, after which they adopted the following resolution, when it had been clearly ascertained that the blow had been given and received:

"*The court of parliament will deliberate upon the conduct of the ex-governor of Brittany, and give its opinion thereon.*"

But the king parried the blow by sending a message to the peers and princes, forbidding them to repair to the palace, or be present at any deliberation which might take place concerning M. d'Aiguillon. They obeyed to the letter.

Then the parliament, determined to do its business itself, passed a decree, in which, after declaring that the Duke d'Aiguillon was seriously inculpated and tainted with suspicion, even on matters which touched his honour, it proclaimed that that peer was suspended from the functions of the peerage, until, by a judgment given in the court of peers, with the forms and solemnities prescribed by the laws and customs of the kingdom, *the place of which nothing can supply*, he had fully cleared himself from the accusations and suspicions now resting on his honour.

But such a decree passed merely in the court of parliament before those interested, and inscribed in their reports, was nothing; public notoriety was wanting, and, above all, that uproar which song alone ventures to raise in France, and which makes song the sovereign controller of events and rulers. This decree of parliament must be heightened and strengthened by the power of song.

Paris desired nothing better than to take part in this commotion. Little disposed to view either court or parliament with favour, Paris in its ceaseless movement was waiting for some good subject for a laugh, as a transition from all the causes for tears which had been furnished it for centuries.

The decree was therefore properly and duly passed, and the parliament appointed commissioners, who were to have it printed under their own eyes. Ten thousand copies of the decree were to be struck off, and the distribution organised without delay.

Then, as it was one of their rules that the person interested should be informed of what the court had done respecting him, the same commissioners proceeded to the hotel of the Duke d'Aiguillon, who had just

arrived in Paris for an important interview, no less indeed than to have a clear and open explanation, which had become necessary between the duke and his uncle, the marshal.

Thanks to Raffe, all Versailles had been informed within an hour of the noble resistance of the old duke to the king's orders, touching the portfolio of M. de Choiseul. Thanks to Versailles, all Paris and all France had learned the same news ; so that Richelieu had found himself for some time past on the summit of popularity, from which he made political grimaces at Madame Dubarry and his dear nephew.

The position was unfavourable for M. d'Aiguillon, who was already so unpopular. The marshal, hated, but at the same time feared, by the people, because he was the living type of that nobility which was so respected and so respectable under Louis XV.—the marshal, so Protean in his character, that, after having chosen a part, he was able to withdraw from it without difficulty when circumstances required it, or when a bon-mot might be the result—Richelieu, we repeat, was a dangerous enemy ; the more so as the worst part of his enmity was always that which he concealed, in order, as he said, to create a surprise.

The Duke d'Aiguillon, since his interview with Madame Dubarry, had two flaws in his coat of mail. Suspecting how much anger and thirst for revenge Richelieu concealed under the apparent equality of his temper, he acted as mariners do in certain cases of difficulty—he burst the waterspout with his cannon, assured that the danger would be less if it were faced boldly. He set about looking everywhere for his uncle, therefore, in order to have a serious conversation with him ; but nothing was more difficult to accomplish than this step, since the marshal had discovered his wish.

Marches and countermarches commenced. When the marshal saw his nephew at a distance, he sent him a smile, and immediately surrounded himself by people who rendered all communication impossible, thus putting the enemy at defiance as from an impregnable fort.

The Duke d'Aiguillon burst the waterspout. He simply presented himself at his uncle's hotel at Versailles ; but Raffe, from his post at the little window of the hotel looking upon the court, recognised the liveries of the duke, and warned his master. The duke entered the marshal's bedroom, where he found Raffe alone, who, with a most confidential smile, was so indiscreet as to inform the nephew that his uncle had not slept at home that night.

M. d'Aiguillon bit his lips and retired. When he returned to his hotel, he wrote to the marshal to request an audience. The marshal could not refuse to reply. If he replied, he could not refuse an audience ; and if he granted the audience, how could he refuse a full explanation ? M. d'Aiguillon resembled too much those polite and engaging duellists, who hide their evil designs under a fascinating and graceful exterior, lead their man upon the ground with bows and reverences, and there put him to death without pity.

The marshal's self-love was not so powerful as to mislead him ; he knew his nephew's power. Once in his presence, his opponent would force from him either a pardon or a concession. Now, Richelieu never pardoned any one, and concessions to an enemy are always a dangerous fault in politics. Therefore, on receipt of M. d'Aiguillon's letter, he pretended to have left Paris for several days.

Raffe, whom he consulted upon this point, gave him the following advice :

"We are on the fair way to ruin M. d'Aiguillon. Our friends of the

parliament will do the work. If M. d'Aiguillon, who suspects this, can lay his hand upon you before the explosion, he will force from you a promise to assist him in case of misfortune ; for your resentment is of that kind that you cannot openly gratify it at the expense of your family interest. If, on the contrary, you refuse, M. d'Aiguillon will leave you knowing you to be his enemy and attributing all his misfortunes to you ; and he will go away comforted, as people always are when they have found out the cause of their complaint, even although the complaint itself be not removed."

"That is quite true," replied Richelieu ; "but I cannot conceal myself for ever. How many days will it be before the explosion takes place ?"

"Six days, my lord."

"Are you sure ?"

Raffe drew from his pocket a letter from a counsellor of the parliament. This letter contained only the two following lines :—

"It has been decided that the decree shall be passed. It will take place on Thursday, the final day fixed on by the company."

"Then the affair is very simple," replied the marshal ; "send the duke back his letter with a note from your own hand :

"MY LORD DUKE,

"You have doubtless heard of the departure of my lord marshal for . . . . This change of air has been judged indispensable by the marshal's physician, who thinks him rather overworked. If, as I believe is the case, after what you did me the honour to tell me the other day, you wish to have an interview with my lord, I can assure you that on Thursday evening next the duke, on his return from . . . . will sleep in his hotel in Paris, where you will certainly find him."

"And now," added the marshal, "hide me somewhere until Thursday."

Raffe punctually fulfilled these instructions ; the letter was written and sent, the hiding place was found. Only one evening, Richelieu, who began to feel very much wearied, slipped out and proceeded to Trianon to speak to Nicole. He risked nothing, or thought he risked nothing, by this step, knowing the Duke d'Aiguillon to be at the pavilion of Luciennes. The result of this manœuvre was, that even if M. d'Aiguillon suspected something, he could not foresee the blow which menaced him until he had actually met his enemy's sword.

The delay until Thursday satisfied him ; on that day he left Versailles with the hope of at last meeting and combating this impalpable antagonist. This Thursday was, as we have said, the day on which parliament was to proclaim its decree.

An agitation, low and muttering as yet, but perfectly intelligible to the Parisian, who knows so well the level of these popular waves, reigned in the wide streets through which M. d'Aiguillon's carriage passed. No notice was taken of him, for he had observed the precaution of coming in a carriage without a coat of arms or other heraldic distinctions.

Here and there he saw busy-looking crowds, who were showing each other some paper which they read with many gesticulations, and collecting in noisy groups, like ants round a piece of sugar fallen to the ground. But this was the period of inoffensive agitation ; the people were then in the habit of congregating together in this manner for a corn tax, for an article in the *Gazette de Holland*, for a verse of Voltaire's, or for a song against Dubarry or Maupeou.

M. d'Aiguillon drove straight to M. de Richelieu's hotel. He found there only Raffe. "The marshal," the secretary said, "was expected every moment; some delay of the post must have detained him at the barrier."

M. d'Aiguillon proposed waiting, not without expressing some impatience to Raffe, for he took this excuse as a new defeat. His ill-humour increased however when Raffe told him that the marshal would be in despair on his return to find that M. d'Aiguillon had been kept waiting; that besides, he was not to sleep in Paris, as he had at first intended; and that, most probably, he would not return from the country alone, and would just call in passing at his hotel to see if there was any news; that therefore M. d'Aiguillon would be wiser to return to his house, where the marshal could call as he passed.

"Listen, Raffe," said D'Aiguillon, who had become more gloomy during this mysterious reply; "you are my uncle's conscience, and I trust you will answer me as an honest man. I am played upon, am I not, and the marshal does not wish to see me? Do not interrupt me, Raffe; you have been a valuable counsellor to me, and I might have been, and can yet be, a good friend to you; must I return to Versailles?"

"My lord duke, I assure you, upon my honour, you will receive a visit at your own house from the marshal in less than an hour."

"Then I can as well wait here, since he will come this way."

"I have had the honour of informing you that he will probably not be alone."

"I understand. And I have your word, Raffe?"

At these words the duke retired deep in thought, but with an air as noble and graceful as the marshal's was the reverse, when, after his nephew's departure, he emerged from a closet, through the glass door of which he had been peeping.

The marshal smiled like one of those hideous demons which Callot has introduced in his "Temptations."

"He suspects nothing, Raffe?" said he.

"Nothing, my lord."

"What hour is it?"

"The hour has nothing to do with the matter, my lord. You must wait until our little procureur of the Chatelet makes his appearance. The commissioners are still at the printer's."

Raffe had scarcely finished, when a footman opened a secret door, and introduced a personage, very ugly, very greasy, very black—one of those living pens for which Monsieur Dubarry professed such a profound antipathy.

Raffe pushed the marshal into a closet, and hastened, smiling, to meet this man.

"Ah! it is you, M. Flageot?" said he; "I am delighted to see you."

"Your servant, Monsieur Raffe. Well! the business is done."

"Is it printed?"

"Five thousand are struck off. The first proofs are already scattered over the town, the others are drying."

"What a misfortune, my dear M. Flageot! What a blow to the marshal's family!"

M. Flageot, to avoid the necessity of answering—that is, of telling a lie—drew a large silver box from his pocket and slowly inhaled a pinch of Spanish snuff.

"Well, what is to be done now?" asked Raffe.

"The forms, my dear sir, the forms. The commissioners, now that they are sure of the printing and the distribution, will immediately enter their carriages, which are waiting at the door of the printing-office, and proceed to make known the decree to M. the Duke d'Aiguillon, who happens luckily—I mean unfortunately, M. Raffe—to be in his hotel in Paris, where they can have an interview with him in person."

Raffe hastily seized an enormous bag of legal documents from a shelf, which he gave to M. Flageot, saying:

"These are the suits which I mentioned to you, sir; the marshal has the greatest confidence in your abilities, and leaves this affair, which ought to prove most remunerative, entirely in your hands. I have to thank you for your good offices in this deplorable conflict of M. d'Aiguillon's with the all-powerful parliament of Paris, and also for your very valuable advice."

And he gently, but with some haste, pushed M. Flageot, delighted with the weight of his burden, towards the door of the antechamber. Then, releasing the marshal from his prison:

"Quick, my lord, to your carriage! You have no time to lose if you wish to be present at the scene. Take care that your horses go more quickly than those of the commissioners."

CHAPTER XCV.

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THE PATH OF A MINISTER IS NOT ALWAYS STREWN WITH ROSES.

THE Marshal de Richelieu's horses did go more quickly than those of the commissioners, for the marshal entered first into the court-yard of the Hotel d'Aiguillon.

The duke did not expect his uncle, and was preparing to return to Luciennes to inform Madame Dubarry that the enemy had been unmasked, when the announcement of the marshal's arrival roused his discouraged mind from its torpor.

The duke hastened to meet his uncle, and took both his hands in his with a warmth of affection proportionate to the fear he had experienced. The marshal was as affectionate as the duke; the tableau was touching. The Duke d'Aiguillon, however, was manifestly endeavouring to hasten the period of explanation, while the marshal, on the contrary, delayed it as much as possible, by looking at the pictures, the bronzes, or the tapestry, and complaining of dreadful fatigue.

The duke cut off the marshal's retreat, imprisoned him in an arm-chair, as M. de Villars imprisoned the Prince Eugene in Marchiennes, and commenced the attack.

"Uncle," said he, "is it true that you, the most discriminating man in France, have judged so ill of me as to think that my self-seeking did not extend to us both?"

There was no longer room for retreat; Richelieu decided on his plan of action.

"What do you mean by that?" replied he, "and in what do you perceive that I judged unfavourably of you or the reverse, my dear nephew?"

"Uncle, you are offended with me."

"But for what, and how?"

"Oh! these loopholes, my lord marshal, will not serve you; in one word, you avoid me when I need your assistance."

"Upon my honour, I do not understand you."

"I will explain, then. The king refused to nominate you for his minister, and because I, on my part, accepted the command of the light horse, you imagine that I have deserted and betrayed you. That dear countess, too, who loves you so well!"

Here Richelieu listened eagerly, but not to his nephew's words alone.

"You say she loves me well, this dear countess?" he added.

"And I can prove it."

"But, my dear fellow, I never doubted it. I send for you to assist me to push the wheel; you are younger, and therefore stronger than I am; you succeed, I fail. That is in the natural course of things, and on my faith I cannot imagine why you have all these scruples. If you have acted for my interest, you will be a hundredfold repaid, if against me—well! I shall only return the fisticuff. Does that require explanation?"

"In truth, uncle——"

"You are a child, duke. Your position is magnificent; a peer of France, a duke, a commander of the light horse, minister in six weeks—you ought to be beyond the influence of all futile intrigues. Success absolves, my dear child. Suppose—I like apologues—suppose that we are the two mules in the fable. But what noise is that?"

"Nothing, my dear uncle, proceed."

"There is something; I hear a carriage in the court-yard."

"Do not let it interrupt you, uncle, pray; your conversation interests me extremely. I like apologues, too."

"Well, my friend, I was going to say that when you are prosperous you will never meet with reproaches, nor need you fear the spite of the envious; but if you limp, if you fall—Diable! you must take care—then it is that the wolf will attack you. But you see I was right; there is a noise in the antechamber; it is the portfolio which they are bringing you, no doubt. The little countess must have exerted herself for you."

The usher entered.

"Messieurs the commissioners of the parliament!" said he, uneasily.

"Ha!" exclaimed Richelieu.

"The commissioners of the parliament here? What do they want with me?" replied the duke, not at all reassured by his uncle's smile.

"In the king's name!" cried a sonorous voice at the end of the antechamber.

"Oh, ho!" cried Richelieu.

M. d'Aiguillon turned very pale; he rose, however, and advanced to the threshold of the apartment to introduce the two commissioners, behind whom were stationed two motionless ushers, and in the distance a host of alarmed footmen.

"What is your errand here?" asked the duke, in a trembling voice.

"Have we the honour of speaking to the Duke d'Aiguillon?" said one of the commissioners.

"I am the Duke d'Aiguillon, gentlemen."

The commissioner, bowing profoundly, drew from his belt the act in proper form, and read it in a loud and distinct voice.

It was the decree, detailed, complete, and circumstantial, which declared D'Aiguillon gravely arraigned and prejudiced by suspicions even

regarding matters which affected his honour, and suspended him from his functions as peer of the realm.

The duke listened to the reading like a man thunderstruck. He stood motionless as a statue on its pedestal, and did not even hold out his hand to take the copy of the decree which the commissioners of the parliament offered him.

It was the marshal who, also standing, but alert and nimble, took the paper, read it, and returned the bow of messieurs the commissioners. They were already at some distance from the mansion, before the Duke d'Aiguillon recovered from his stupor.

"This is a severe blow," said Richelieu; "you are no longer a peer of France; it is humiliating."

The duke turned to his uncle as if he had only at that moment recovered the power of life and thought.

"You did not expect it?" asked Richelieu, in the same tone.

"And you, uncle?" rejoined D'Aiguillon.

"How do you imagine any one could suspect that the parliament would strike so bold a blow at the favoured courtier of the king and his favourite; these people will ruin themselves."

The duke sat down, and leaned his burning cheek on his hand.

"But if," continued the old marshal, forcing the dagger deeper into the wound, "if the parliament degrades you from the peerage because you are nominated to the command of the light-horse, they will decree you a prisoner and condemn you to the stake when you are appointed minister. These people hate you, D'Aiguillon; do not trust them."

The duke bore this cruel irony with the fortitude of a hero; his misfortune raised and strengthened his mind. Richelieu thought this fortitude was only insensibility, or want of comprehension perhaps, and that the wound had not been deep enough.

"Being no longer a peer," said he, "you will be less exposed to the hatred of these lawyers. Take refuge in a few years of obscurity. Besides, look you, this obscurity, which will be your safeguard, will come without your seeking it. Deprived of your functions of peer, you will have more difficulty in reaching the ministry, and may perhaps escape the business altogether. But if you will struggle, my dear fellow, why, you have Madame Dubarry on your side; she loves you, and she is a powerful support."

M. d'Aiguillon rose. He did not even cast an angry look upon the marshal in return for all the suffering the old man had inflicted upon him.

"You are right, uncle," he replied calmly, "and your wisdom is shown in this last advice. The Countess Dubarry, to whom you had the goodness to present me, and to whom you spoke so favourably of me and with so much zeal, that every one at Luciennes can bear witness to it, Madame Dubarry will defend me. Thanks to heaven, she likes me; she is brave, and exerts an all-powerful influence over the mind of the king. Thanks, uncle, for your advice; I fly thither as to a haven of safety. My horses! Bourgignon—to Luciennes!"

The marshal remained in the middle of an unfinished smile. M. d'Aiguillon bowed respectfully to his uncle and quitted the apartment, leaving the marshal very much perplexed, and above all very much confused, at the eagerness with which he had attacked this noble and feeling victim.

There was some consolation for the old marshal in the mad joy of the Parisians when they read in the evening the ten thousand copies of the

decree, which was scrambled for in the streets. But he could not help sighing when Raffe asked for an account of the evening. Nevertheless, he told it without concealing anything.

"Then the blow is parried?" said the secretary.

"Yes and no, Raffe; but the wound is not mortal, and we have at Trianon something better, which I reproach myself for not having made my sole care. We have started two hares, Raffe; it was very foolish."

"Why—if you seize the best?" replied Raffe.

"Oh, my friend, remember that the best is always the one we have not taken, and we would invariably give the one we hold for the one which has escaped."

Raffe shrugged his shoulders, and yet M. de Richelieu was in the right.

"You think," said he, "that M. d'Aiguillon will escape?"

"Do you think the king will, simpleton?"

"Oh! the king finds an opening everywhere; but this matter does not concern the king, that I know of."

"Where the king can pass, Madame Dubarry will pass, as she holds fast by his skirts; where Madame Dubarry has passed, D'Aiguillon will pass also—but you understand nothing of politics, Raffe."

"My lord, M. Flageot is not of your opinion."

"Well, what does this M. Flageot say? But first of all, tell me what he is."

"He is a procureur, sir."

"Well?"

"Well! M. Flageot thinks that the king cannot get out of this matter."

"Oh! ho!—and who will stop the lion?"

"Faith, sir, the rat!"

"And you believe him?"

"I always believe a procureur who promises to do evil."

"We shall see what means M. Flageot intends to employ, Raffe."

"That is what I say, my lord."

"Come to supper then, that I may get to bed. It has quite upset me to see that my poor nephew is no longer peer of France, and will not be minister. I am an uncle, Raffe, after all!"

M. de Richelieu sighed, and then commenced to laugh.

"You have every quality, however, requisite for a minister," replied Raffe.

CHAPTER XCVI.

M. D'AIGUILLON TAKES HIS REVENGE.

THE morning succeeding the day on which the terrible decree had thrown Paris and Versailles into an uproar, when every one was anxiously awaiting the result of this decree, the Duke de Richelieu, who had returned to Versailles and had resumed his regularly irregular life, saw Raffe enter his apartment with a letter in his hand. The secretary scrutinized and weighed this letter with such an appearance of anxiety that his emotion quickly communicated itself to his master.

"What is the matter now?" asked the marshal.

"Something not very agreeable, I presume, my lord, and which is enclosed in this letter."

"Why do you imagine so?"

"Because the letter is from the Duke d'Aiguillon."

"Ha!" said the duke, "from my nephew?"

"Yes, my lord marshal; after the king's council broke up, an usher of the chamber called on me and handed me this paper for you. I have been turning it over and over for the last ten minutes, and I cannot help suspecting that it contains some evil tidings."

The duke held out his hand.

"Give it me," said he, "I am brave."

"I warn you," interrupted Raffe, "that when the usher gave me the paper, he chuckled outrageously."

"Diable! that bodes ill," replied the marshal; "but give it me, nevertheless."

"And he added: 'M. d'Aguillon wishes the marshal to have this immediately.'"

"Pain! thou shalt not make me say that thou art an evil," said the marshal, breaking the seal with a firm hand. And he read it.

"Ha! you change countenance," said Raffe, standing with his hands crossed behind him, in an attitude of observation.

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Richelieu, continuing to read.

"It seems, then, that it is serious?"

"You look quite delighted."

"Of course—I see that I was not mistaken."

The marshal read on.

"The king is good," said he, after a moment's pause.

"He appoints M. d'Aguillon minister?"

"Better than that."

"Oh! What then?"

"Read and ponder."

Raffe in his turn read the note. It was in the handwriting of D'Aguillon, and was couched in the following terms:

"MY DEAR UNCLE,

"Your good advice has borne its fruit: I confided my wrongs to that excellent friend of our house, the Countess Dubarry, who has deigned to lay them at his majesty's feet. The king is indignant at the violence with which the gentlemen of the parliament pursue me, and in consideration of the services I have so faithfully rendered him, his majesty, in this morning's council, has annulled the decree of parliament, and has commanded me to continue my functions as peer of France.

"Knowing the pleasure this news will cause you, my dear uncle, I send you the tenor of the decision, which his majesty in council came to to-day. I have had it copied by a secretary, and you have the announcement before any one else.

"Deign to believe in my affectionate respect, my dear uncle, and continue to bestow on me your good will and advice.

"(Signed)—DUKE D'AIGUILLON."

"He mocks at me into the bargain!" cried Richelieu.

"Faith, I think so, my lord."

"The king throws himself into the hornet's nest!"

"You would not believe me yesterday, when I told you so."

"I did not say he would not throw himself into it, Raffe; I said he would contrive to get out of it. Now, you see, he does get out of it."

"The fact is, the parliament is beaten."

"And I also."

"For the present, yes."

"For ever! Yesterday I foresaw it, and you consoled me so well, that some misfortune could not fail to ensue."

"My lord, you despair a little too soon, I think."

"Master Raffe, you are a fool. I am beaten, and I must pay the stake. You do not fully comprehend, perhaps, how disagreeable it is to me to be the laughing-stock of Luciennes; at this moment, the duke is mocking me in company with Madame Dubarry: Mademoiselle Chon, and Monsieur Jean are roaring themselves hoarse at my expense, whilst the little negro ceases to stuff himself with sweetmeats to make game of me. Parbleu! I have a tolerably good temper, but all this makes me furious."

"Furious, my lord?"

"I have said it—furious!"

"Then you have done what you should not have done," said Raffe, philosophically.

"You urged me on, Master Secretary."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Why, what is it to me whether M. d'Aiguillon is a peer of France or not—I ask you, my lord? Your nephew does me no injury, I think."

"Master Raffe, you are impertinent."

"You have been telling me so for the last forty-nine years, my lord."

"Well, I shall repeat it again."

"Not for forty-nine years more, that is one comfort."

"Raffe, if this is the way you care for my interests——"

"The interests of your little passions? No, my lord duke, never! Man of genius as you are, you sometimes commit follies which I could not forgive even in an understrapper like myself."

"Explain yourself, Raffe, and if I am wrong, I will confess it."

"Yesterday you thirsted for vengeance, did you not? You wished to behold the humiliation of your nephew; you wished, as it were, to be the bearer of the decree of parliament, and gloat over the tremblings and palpitations of your victim, as M. Crebillon the younger says. Well! my lord marshal, such sights as these must be well paid for; such pleasures cost dear. You are rich—pay, pay, my lord marshal!"

"What would you have done in my place, then, O most skilful of tacticians? Come, let me see."

"Nothing! I would have waited without giving any sign of life. But you itched to oppose the parliament to the Dubarry, from the moment she found that M. d'Aiguillon was a younger man than yourself."

A groan was the marshal's only reply.

"Well!" continued Raffe, "the parliament was tolerably well prompted by you before it did what it has done. The decree once passed, you should have offered your services to your nephew, who would have suspected nothing."

"That is all well and good, and I admit that I did wrong, but you should have warned me."

"I hinder any evil! You take me for some one else, my lord marshal; you repeat to every one that comes that I am your creature, that you have trained me, and yet you would have me not delighted when I see a folly committed, or a misfortune approaching! Fie! fie!"

"Then a misfortune will happen, Master Sorcerer?"

"Certainly."

"What misfortune?"

"You will quarrel, and M. d'Aiguillon will become the link between the parliament and Madame Dubarry; then he will be minister, and you exiled, or at the Bastille."

The marshal in his anger upset the contents of his snuff-box upon the carpet.

"In the Bastille!" said he, shrugging his shoulders; "is Louis XV., think you, Louis XIV.?"

"No, but Madame Dubarry, supported by M. d'Aiguillon, is quite equal to Madame de Maintenon. Take care; I do not know any princess in the present day who would bring you bonbons and eggs."

"These are melancholy prognostics," replied the marshal, after a long silence. "You read the future; but what of the present, if you please?"

"My lord marshal is too wise for me to give him advice."

"Come, master witty-pate, are you too not mocking me?"

"I beg you to remark, my lord marshal, that you confound dates; a man is never called a witty-pate after forty: now, I am sixty-seven."

"No matter, assist me out of this scrape—and quickly too—quickly!"

"By an advice?"

"By anything you please."

"The time has not come yet."

"Now you are certainly jesting."

"Would to heaven I were! When I jest, the subject shall be a jesting matter—and unfortunately this is not."

"What do you mean by saying that it is not yet time?"

"No, my lord, it is not time. If the announcement of the king's decree were known in Paris beforehand, I would not say. Shall we send a courier to the President d'Aligre?"

"That they may laugh at us all the sooner?"

"What a ridiculous self-love, my lord marshal! You would make a saint lose patience. Stay, let me finish my plan of a descent on England, and you can finish drowning yourself in your portfolio intrigue, since the business is already half done."

The marshal was accustomed to these sullen humours of his secretary. He knew that when his melancholy had once declared itself he was dangerous to touch with ungloved fingers.

"Come," said he, "do not pout at me, and if I do not understand, explain yourself."

"Then my lord wishes me to trace out a line of conduct for him?"

"Certainly, since you think I cannot conduct myself."

"Well then, listen."

"I am all attention."

"You must send by a trusty messenger to M. d'Aligre," said Raffe, abruptly, "the Duke d'Aiguillon's letter, and also the decree of the king in council. You must then wait till the parliament has met and deliberated upon it, which will take place immediately; whereupon you must order your carriage, and pay a visit to your little procureur, M. Flageot."

"Eh!" said Richelieu, whom this name made start as it had done on the previous day; "M. Flageot again! What the deuce has M. Flageot to do with all this, and what am I to do at his house?"

"I have had the honour to tell you, my lord, that M. Flageot is your procureur."

"Well! what then?"

"Well, if he is your procureur, he has certain bags of yours—certain law-suits on hand; you must go and ask him about them."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes, my lord marshal, to-morrow."

"But all this is your affair, M. Raffe."

"By no means! by no means! When M. Flageot was a simple scribbling drudge, then I could treat with him as an equal; but as, dating from to-morrow, M. Flageot is an Attila, a scourge of kings—neither more nor less—it is not asking too much of a duke, a peer, a marshal of France, to converse with this all-powerful man."

"Is this serious, or are we acting a farce?"

"You will see to-morrow if it is serious, my lord."

"But tell me what will be the result of my visit to your M. Flageot."

"I should be very sorry to do so; you would endeavour to prove to me to-morrow that you had guessed it beforehand. Good-night, my lord-marshal. Remember: a courier to M. d'Aligre immediately—a visit to M. Flageot to-morrow. Oh! the address?—The coachman knows it; he has driven me there frequently during the last week."

CHAPTER XCVII.

IN WHICH THE READER WILL ONCE MORE MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE WHOM HE THOUGHT LOST, AND WHOM PERHAPS HE DID NOT REGRET.

THE reader will no doubt ask why M. Flageot, who is about to play so majestic a part in our story, was called procureur instead of avocat; and as the reader is quite right, we shall satisfy his curiosity.

The vacations had, for some time, been frequent in parliament, and the lawyers spoke so seldom that their speeches were not worth speaking of. Master Flageot, foreseeing the time when there would be no pleading at all, made certain arrangements with Master Guildou, the procureur, in virtue of which the latter yielded him up office and clients on consideration of the sum of twenty-five thousand livres paid down. That is how Master Flageot became a procureur. But if we are asked how he managed to pay the twenty-five thousand livres, we reply, by marrying Madame Marguerite, to whom this sum was left as an inheritance about the end of the year 1770—three months before M. de Choiseul's exile.

Master Flageot had been long distinguished for his persevering adherence to the opposition party. Once a procureur, he redoubled his violence, and by this violence succeeded in gaining some celebrity. It was this celebrity, together with the publication of an incendiary pamphlet on the subject of the conflict between M. d'Aiguillon and M. de la Chalotais, which attracted the attention of M. Raffe, who had occasion to keep himself well informed concerning the affairs of parliament.

But, notwithstanding his new dignity and his increasing importance, Master Flageot did not leave the Rue du Petit-Lion-Saint-Sauveur. It would have been too cruel a blow for Madame Marguerite not to have heard the neighbours call her Madame Flageot, and not to have inspired

respect in the breasts of M. Guildou's clerks, who had entered the service of the new procureur.

The reader may readily imagine what M. de Richelieu suffered in traversing Paris—the filthy Paris of that region—to reach the disgusting hole which the Parisian magistrature dignified with the name of street.

In front of M. Flageot's door, M. de Richelieu's carriage was stopped by another carriage which pulled up at the same moment. The marshal perceived a woman's head-dress protruding from the window of this carriage; and as his sixty-five years of age had not quenched the ardour of his gallantry, he hastily jumped out on the muddy pavement, and proceeded to offer his hand to the lady, who was unaccompanied.

But this day the marshal's evil star was in the ascendant. A long, withered leg which was stretched out to reach the step betrayed the old woman. A wrinkled face, adorned with a dark streak of rouge, proved further that the old woman was not only old but decrepit.

Nevertheless, there was no room for retreat; the marshal had made the movement, and the movement had been seen. Besides, M. de Richelieu himself was no longer young. In the meantime, the litigant—for what woman with a carriage would have entered that street had she not been a litigant?—the litigant, we say, did not imitate the duke's hesitation; with a ghastly smile she placed her hand in Richelieu's.

"I have seen that face somewhere before," thought Richelieu; then he added:

"Does madame also intend to visit M. Flageot?"

"Yes, duke," replied the old lady.

"Oh, I have the honour to be known to you, madame!" exclaimed the duke, disagreeably surprised, and stopping on the threshold of the dark passage.

"Who does not know the Duke de Richelieu?" was the reply. "I should not be a woman if I did not."

"This she-ape thinks she is a woman!" murmured the conqueror of Mahon, and he made a most graceful bow.

"If I may venture to ask the question," added he, "to whom have I the honour of speaking?"

"I am the Countess de Bearn, at your service," replied the old lady, curtseying with courtly reverence upon the dirty floor of the passage, and about three inches from the open trap-door of a cellar, into which the marshal wickedly awaited her disappearance at the third bend.

"I am delighted, madame—enchanted," said he, "and I return a thousand thanks to fate. You also have law-suits on hand, countess?"

"Oh! duke, I have only one; but what a law-suit! Is it possible that you have never heard of it?"

"Oh, frequently, frequently—that great law-suit. True; I entreat your pardon. How the deuce could I have forgotten that?"

"Against the Saluces!"

"Against the Saluces, yes, countess; the lawsuit about which the song was written."

"A song?" said the old lady, piqued, "what song?"

"Take care, madame, there is a trap-door here," said the duke, who saw that the old woman was decided not to throw herself into the cellar; "take hold of the balustrade—I mean the cord."

The old lady mounted the first steps. The duke followed her.

"Yes, a very humorous song," said he.

"A humorous song on my lawsuit!"

"Dame! I shall leave you to judge—but perhaps you know it?"

"Not at all."

"It is to the tune of the Bourbonnaise; it runs so:

"'Embarrassed, countess, as I stand,
Give me, I pray, a helping hand,
And I am quite at your command.'

It is Madame Dubarry who speaks, you must understand."

"That is very impertinent towards her."

"Oh! what can you expect?—the ballad-mongers respect no one. Heavens! how greasy this cord is! Then you reply as follows:

"'I'm very old and stubborn, too;
I'm forced at law my rights to sue;
Ah, who can help me? tell me who!'"

"Oh! sir, it is frightful!" cried the countess; "a woman of quality is not to be insulted in this manner."

"Madame, excuse me if I have sung out of tune; these stairs heat me so. Ah! here we are at last. Allow me to pull the bell."

The old lady, grumbling all the time, made way for the duke to pass.

The marshal rang, and Madame Flageot, who in becoming a procureur's wife had not ceased to fill the functions of portress and cook, opened the door. The two litigants were ushered into M. Flageot's study, where they found that worthy in a state of furious excitement, and with a pen in his mouth, hard at work dictating a terrible plea to his head-clerk.

"Good heavens, Master Flageot! what is the matter?" cried the countess, at whose voice the attorney turned round.

"Ah! madame, your most humble servant—a chair here for the Countess de Beam. This gentleman is a friend of yours, madame, I presume. But surely—oh! I cannot be mistaken—the Duke de Richelieu in my house! Another chair, Bernardet—another chair."

"Master Flageot," said the countess, "how does my lawsuit get on, pray?"

"Ah, madame! I was just now working for you."

"Very good, Master Flageot, very good."

"And after a fashion, my lady, which will make some noise, I hope."

"Hum! Take care!"

"Oh! madame, there is no longer any occasion for caution."

"Then if you are busy about my affair, you can give an audience to the duke."

"Excuse me, my lord duke," said Master Flageot; "but you are too gallant not to understand——"

"I understand, Master Flageot; I understand."

"But now I can attend to you exclusively."

"Don't be uneasy; I shall not abuse your good-nature; you are aware what brings me here?"

"The bags which M. Raffe gave me the other day."

"Some papers relative to my lawsuit of—my suit about—dence take it! You must know what suit I mean, Master Flageot?"

"Your lawsuit about the lands of Chapenat."

"Very probably; and will you gain it for me? That would be very kind on your part."

"My lord, it is postponed indefinitely."

"Postponed! And why?"

"It will not be brought forward in less than a year, at the earliest."

"For what reason, may I ask?"

"Circumstances, my lord, circumstances; you have heard of his majesty's decree?"

"I think so; but which one? His majesty publishes so many."

"The one which annuls ours."

"Very well; and what then?"

"Well! my lord duke, we shall reply by burning our ships."

"Burning your ships, my dear friend?—you will burn the ships of the parliament? I do not quite comprehend you; I was not aware that the parliament had ships."

"The first chamber refuses to register, perhaps?" inquired the Countess de Bearn, whom Richelieu's lawsuit in no way prevented from thinking of her own.

"Better than that."

"The second one also?"

"That would be a mere nothing. Both chambers have resolved not to give any judgments until the king shall have dismissed M. d'Aiguillon."

"Bah!" exclaimed the marshal, rubbing his hands.

"Not adjudicate! on what?" asked the countess, alarmed.

"On the lawsuits, madame."

"They will not adjudicate on my lawsuit," exclaimed the Countess de Bearn, with a dismay which she did not even attempt to conceal.

"Neither on yours, madame, nor the duke's."

"It is iniquitous! It is rebellion against his majesty's orders, that!"

"Madame," replied the procureur majestically, "the king has forgotten himself; we shall forget also."

"Monsieur Flageot, you will be sent to the Bastille; remember, I warn you."

"I shall go singing, madame, and if I am sent thither, all my fellow-members of parliament will follow me, carrying palms in their hands."

"He is mad!" said the countess to Richelieu.

"We are all the same," replied the procureur.

"Oh, oh!" said the marshal, "that is becoming rather curious."

"But, sir, you said just now that you were working for me," replied Madame de Bearn.

"I said so, and it is quite true. You, madame, are the first example I cite in my narration; here is the paragraph which relates to you."

He snatched the draft from his clerk's hand, fixed his spectacles upon his nose, and read with emphasis:

"Their position ruined, their fortune compromised, their duties trampled under foot! His majesty will understand how much they must have suffered. Thus the petitioner had entrusted to his care a very important suit, upon which the fortune of one of the first families in the kingdom depends; by his zeal, his industry, and, he ventures to say, his talents, this suit was progressing favourably, and the rights of the most noble and most powerful lady, Angelique Charlotte Veronique, Countess de Bearn, were on the point of being recognised, proclaimed, when the breath of discord —engulphing——"

"I had just got so far," madame," said the procureur, drawing himself up; "but I think the simile is not amiss."

"M. Flageot," said the countess, "it is forty years ago since, at first employed your father, who proved most worthy of my patronage; I con-

tinued that patronage to you; you have gained ten or twelve thousand livres by my suit, and you would probably have gained as many more."

"Write down all that," said M. Flageot eagerly to his clerk; "it is a testimony, a proof. It shall be inserted in the confirmation."

"But now," interrupted the countess, "I take back all my papers from your charge; from this moment you have lost my confidence."

Master Flageot, thunderstruck with this disgrace, remained for a moment almost stupefied; but, all at once, rising under the blow like a martyr who dies for his religion:

"Be it so," said he. "Bernadet, give the papers back to madame; and you will insert this fact," added he, "that the petitioner preferred his conscience to his fortune."

"I beg your pardon, countess," whispered the marshal in the countess's ear, "but it seems to me that you have acted without reflection."

"In what respect, my lord duke?"

"You take back your papers from this honest procureur, but for what purpose?"

"To take them to another procureur, to another avocat!" exclaimed the countess.

Master Flageot raised his eyes to heaven, with a mournful smile of self-denial and stoic resignation.

"But," continued the marshal, still whispering in the countess's ear, "if it has been decided that the chambers will not adjudicate, my dear madame, another procureur can do no more than Master Flageot."

"It is a league, then?"

"Pardieu! do you think Master Flageot fool enough to protest alone, to lose his practice alone, if his fellow lawyers were not agreed to do the same, and consequently support him?"

"But you, my lord duke, what will you do?"

"For my part, I declare that I think Master Flageot a very honest procureur, and that my papers are as safe in his possession as in my own. Consequently I shall leave them with him, of course paying him as if my suit were going on."

"It is well said, my lord marshal, that you are a generous, liberal-minded man!" exclaimed Master Flageot; "I shall spread your fame far and wide, my lord."

"You absolutely overwhelm me, my dear procureur," replied Richelieu, bowing.

"Bernadet," cried the enthusiastic procureur to his clerk, "you will insert in the peroration a eulogy on the Marshal de Richelieu."

"No, no! by no means, Master Flageot! I beg you will do nothing of the kind," replied the marshal hastily. "Diable! that would be a pretty action! I love secrecy in what it is customary to call good actions. Do not disoblige me, Master Flageot—I shall deny it, look you—I shall positively contradict it—my modesty is susceptible. Well, countess, what say you?"

"I say my suit *shall* be judged. I must have a judgment, and I will."

"And I say, madame, that if your suit is judged, the king must first send the Swiss guards, the light horse, and twenty pieces of cannon into the great hall," replied Master Flageot with a belligerent air, which completed the consternation of the litigant.

"Then you do not think his majesty can get out of this scrape," said Richelieu in a low voice to Flageot.

"Impossible, my lord marshal. It is an unheard-of case. No more justice in France! It is as if you were to say no more bread!"

"Do you think so?"

"You will see."

"But the king will be angry."

"We are resolved to brave everything."

"Even exile?"

"Even death, my lord marshal! We have a heart, although we wear the gown."

And M. Flageot struck his breast vigorously.

"In fact, madame," said Richelieu to his companion, "I believe that this is an unfortunate step for the ministry."

"Oh yes!" replied the old countess, after a pause; "it is very unfortunate for me, who never meddle in anything that passes, to be dragged into this conflict."

"I think, madame," said the marshal, "there is some one who could help you in this affair—a very powerful person. But would that person do it?"

"Is it displaying too much curiosity, duke, to ask the name of this powerful person?"

"Your goddaughter," said the duke.

"Oh! Madame Dubarry?"

"The same."

"In fact, that is true; I am obliged to you for the hint."

The duke bit his lips.

"Then you will go to Luciennes?" asked he.

"Without hesitation."

"But the Countess Dubarry cannot overcome the opposition of Parliament."

"I will tell her I must have my suit judged, and as she can refuse me nothing, after the service I have rendered her, she will tell the king she wishes it. His majesty will speak to the chancellor, and the chancellor has a long arm, duke. Master Flageot, be kind enough to continue to study my case well; it may come on sooner than you think. Mark my words."

Master Flageot turned away his head with an air of incredulity which did not shake the countess in the least. In the meantime the duke had been reflecting.

"Well, madame, since you are going to Luciennes, will you have the goodness to present my most humble respects?"

"Most willingly, duke."

"We are companions in misfortune; your suit is in abeyance, and mine also. In supplicating for yourself you will do so for me too. Moreover, you may express *yonder* the sort of pleasure these stubborn-headed parliament men cause me; and you will add that it was I who advised you to have recourse to the divinity of Luciennes."

"I will not fail to do so, duke. Adieu, gentlemen."

"Allow me the honour of conducting you to your carriage."

"Once more, adieu, Monsieur Flageot; I leave you to your occupations." The marshal handed the countess to her carriage.

"Raffe was right," said he, "the Flageots will cause a revolution. Thank heaven! I am supported on both sides—I am of the court, and of the parliament. Madame Dubarry will meddle with politics and fall, alone, if she resists, I have my little pretty-face at Trianon. Decidedly, Raffe is of my school, and when I am minister he shall be my chief secretary."

CHAPTER XCVIII.

THE CONFUSION INCREASES.

MADAME DE BEARN followed Richelieu's advice literally. Two hours and a half after the duke had left her, she was waiting in the antechamber at Luciennes, in the company of M. Zamore.

It was some time since she had been seen at Madame Dubarry's, and her presence therefore excited a feeling of curiosity in the countess's boudoir when her name was announced.

M. d'Aiguillon had not lost any time either, and he was plotting with the favourite when Chon entered to request an audience for Madame de Bearn. The duke made a movement to retire, but the countess detained him.

"I would rather you would remain," said she. "In case my old alms-giver comes to ask a loan, you would be most useful to me, for she will ask less."

The duke remained. Madame de Bearn, with a face composed for the occasion, took the chair opposite the countess, which the latter offered to her, and after the first civilities were exchanged :

"May I ask to what fortunate chance I am indebted for your presence, madame?" said Madame Dubarry.

"Ah ! madame," said the old litigant, "a great misfortune."

"What ! madame—a misfortune ?"

"A piece of news which will deeply afflict his majesty."

"I am all impatience, madame——"

"The parliament——"

"Oh, ho !" grumbled the Duke d'Aiguillon.

"The Duke d'Aiguillon," said the countess, hastily introducing her guest to her lady visitor, for fear of some unpleasant contretemps. But the old countess was as cunning as all the other courtiers put together, and never caused a misunderstanding, except wittingly, and when the misunderstanding seemed likely to benefit her.

"I know," said she, "all the baseness of these lawyers, and their want of respect for merit of high birth."

This compliment, aimed directly at the duke, drew a most graceful bow from him, which the litigant returned with an equally graceful curtsey.

"But," continued she, "it is not the duke alone who is now concerned, but the entire population : the parliament refuse to act."

"Indeed !" exclaimed Madame Dubarry, throwing herself back upon the sofa ; "there will be no more justice in France ! Well ! What change will that produce ?"

The duke smiled. As for Madame de Bearn, instead of taking the affair pleasantly, her morose features darkened still more. "It is a great calamity, madame," said she.

"Ah ! indeed ?" replied the favourite.

"It is evident, madame, that you are happy enough to have no law-suits."

"Hem !" said D'Aiguillon, to recall the attention of Madame Dubarry, who at last comprehended the insinuation of the litigant.

"Alas! madame," said she, "it is true; you remind me that if I have no lawsuit, you have a very important one."

"Ah, yes! madame, and delay will be ruinous to me."

"Poor lady!"

"Unless, countess, the king takes some decided step."

"Oh! madame, the king is right well inclined to do so. He will exile messieurs the councillors, and all will be right."

"But, madame, that would be an indefinite adjournment."

"Do you see any remedy, then? Will you be kind enough to point it out to us?"

The litigant concealed her face beneath her hood, like Cæsar expiring under his toga.

"There is one remedy, certainly," said D'Aiguillon; "but perhaps his majesty might shrink from employing it."

"What is it?" asked the plaintiff, with anxiety.

"The ordinary resource of royalty in France, when it is rather embarrassed. It is to hold a bed of justice, and to say, 'I will!' when all the opponents say, 'I will not.'"

"An excellent idea!" exclaimed Madame de Beam, with enthusiasm.

"But which must not be divulged," replied D'Aiguillon, diplomatically, and with a gesture which Madame de Bearn fully comprehended.

"Oh! madame," said she instantly, "you who have so much influence with the king, persuade him to say, 'I will have the suit of Madame de Bearn judged.' Besides, you know, it was promised long ago."

M. d'Aiguillon bit his lips, glanced an adieu to Madame Dubarry, and left the boudoir. He had heard the sound of the king's carriage in the court-yard.

"Here is the king!" said Madame Dubarry, rising to dismiss her visitor.

"Oh! madame, why will you not permit me to throw myself at his majesty's feet?"

"To ask him for a bed of justice?" replied the countess, quickly. "Most willingly! Remain here, madame, since such is your desire."

Scarcely had Madame de Bearn adjusted her head-dress when the king entered.

"Ah!" said he, "you have visitors, countess!"

"Madame de Bearn, sire."

"Sire, justice!" exclaimed the old lady, making a most profound reverence.

"Oh!" said Louis XV. in a bantering tone, imperceptible to those who did not know him; "has any one offended you, madame?"

"Sire, I ask for justice."

"Against whom?"

"Against the parliament."

"Ah! good," said the king, rubbing his hands; "you complain of my parliament. Well! do me the pleasure to bring them to reason. I too have to complain of them, and I beg you to grant me justice also," added he, imitating the curtseys of the old countess.

"But, sire, you are the king—the master."

"The king—yes; the master—not always."

"Sire, proclaim your will."

"I do that every evening, madame; and they proclaim theirs every morning. Now, as these two wills are diametrically opposed to each other,

it is with us as with the earth and the moon, which are ever running after each other without meeting."

"Sire, your voice is powerful enough to drown all the bawlings of these fellows."

"There you are mistaken. I am not a lawyer, as they are. If I say yes, they say no; it is impossible for us to come to any arrangement. If, when I have said yes, you can find any means to prevent their saying no, will make an alliance with you."

"Sire, I have the means."

"Let me hear it quickly."

"I will, sire. Hold a bed of justice."

"That is another embarrassment," said the king; "a bed of justice—remember, madam—is almost a revolution."

"It is simply telling these rebellious subjects that you are the master. You know, sire, that when the king proclaims his will in this manner, he alone has a right to speak: no one answers. You say to them, *I will*, and they bow their assent."

"The fact is," said the Countess Dubarry, "the idea is a magnificent one."

"Magnificent it may be, but not good," replied Louis.

"But what a noble spectacle!" resumed Madame Dubarry, with warmth; "the procession, the nobles, the peers, the entire military staff of the king! Then the immense crowd of people; then the bed of justice, composed of five cushions embroidered with golden fleurs-de-lys—it would be a splendid ceremony!"

"You think so?" said the king, rather shaken in his resolution.

"Then the king's magnificent dress—the cloak lined with ermine, the diamonds in the crown, the golden sceptre—all the splendour which so well suits an august and noble countenance! Oh! how handsome you would look, sire!"

"It is a long time since we had a bed of justice," said Louis, with affected carelessness.

"Not since your childhood, sire," said Madame de Bearn. "The remembrance of your brilliant beauty on that occasion has remained engraven on the hearts of all."

"And then," added Madame Dubarry, "there would be an excellent opportunity for the chancellor to display his keen and concise eloquence—to crush these people with his truth, dignity, and power."

"I must wait for the parliament's next misdeed," said Louis; "then I shall see."

"What can you wait for, sire, more outrageous than what they have just committed?"

"Why, what have they done?"

"Do you not know?"

"They have teased M. d'Aiguillon a little, but that is not a hanging offence; although," said the king, looking at Madame Dubarry, "although this dear duke is a friend of mine. Besides, if the parliament has teased the duke a little, I have punished them for their ill-nature by my decree of yesterday or the day before—I do not remember which. We are now even."

"Well, sire," said Madame Dubarry, with warmth, "Madame de Bearn has just informed us that this morning these black-gowned gentlemen have taken the start of you."

"How so?" said the king, frowning.

"Speak, madame, the king permits it," said the favourite.

"Sire, the councillors have determined not to hold a court of parliament until your majesty yields to their wishes."

"What say you?" said the king. "You mistake, madame; that would be an act of rebellion, and my parliament dares not revolt, I hope."

"Sire, I assure you——"

"Oh! madame, it is a mere rumour."

"Will your majesty deign to hear me?"

"Speak, countess."

"Well, my procureur has this morning returned me all the papers relating to my lawsuit. He can no longer plead, since they will no longer judge."

"Mere reports, I tell you—attempts at intimidation."

But while he spoke, the king paced up and down the boudoir in agitation.

"Sire, will your majesty believe M. de Richelieu, if you will not believe me? In my presence his papers were returned to him also, and the duke left the house in a rage."

"Some one is tapping at the door," said the king, to change the conversation.

"It is Zamore, sire."

Zamore entered.

"A letter, mistress," said he.

"With your permission, sire," said the countess. "Ah! good heavens!" exclaimed she, suddenly.

"What is the matter?"

"From the chancellor, sire. M. de Maupeou, knowing that your majesty has deigned to pay me a visit, solicits my intervention to obtain an audience for him."

"What is in the wind now?"

"Show the chancellor in," said Madame Dubarry. The Countess de Bearn rose to take her leave.

"You need not go, madame," said the king. "Good-day, M. de Maupeou. What news?"

"Sire," said the chancellor, bowing, "the parliament embarrassed you; you have no longer a parliament."

"How so? Are they all dead? Have they taken arsenic?"

"Would to heaven they had! No, sire, they live; but they will not sit any longer, and have sent in their resignations. I have just received them in a mass."

"The counsellors?"

"No, sire, the resignations."

"I told you, sire, that it was a serious matter," said the countess, in a low voice.

"Most serious," replied Louis, impatiently. "Well, chancellor, what have you done?"

"Sire, I have come to receive your majesty's orders."

"We shall exile these people, Maupeou."

"Sire, they will not judge any better in exile."

"We shall command them to judge. Bah! injunctions are out of date—letters of order likewise——"

"Ah! sire, this time you must be determined."

"Yes, you are right."

"Courage!" said Madame de Bearn aside to the countess.

"And act the master, after having too often acted only the father," said the countess.

"Chancellor," said the king, slowly, "I know only one remedy; it is serious, but efficacious. I will hold a bed of justice; these people must be made to tremble once for all."

"Ah! sire," exclaimed the chancellor, "that is well spoken; they must bend or break!"

"Madame," added the king, addressing Madame de Bearn, "if your suit be not judged, you see it will not be my fault."

"Sire, you are the greatest monarch in the world!"

"Oh! yes," echoed the countess, Chon, and the chancellor.

"The world does not say so, however," murmured the king.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE BED OF JUSTICE.

THIS famous bed of justice took place with all the ceremonies which royal pride, on the one hand, and the intrigues which drove the master to this step, on the other, demanded.

The household of the king was placed under arms; an abundance of short-robed archers, soldiers of the watch, and police officers were commissioned to protect the lord chancellor, who, like a general upon the decisive day, would have to expose his sacred person to secure the success of the enterprise.

The chancellor was execrated. Of this he was well aware, and if his vanity made him fear assassination, those better versed in the sentiments of the public towards him could without exaggerating have predicted some downright insults, or at least hootings, as likely to fall to his share. The same perquisites were promised to M. d'Aiguillon, who was equally obnoxious to the popular instincts, improved perhaps by parliamentary debates. The king affected serenity, yet he was not easy. But he donned with great satisfaction his magnificent robes, and straightway came to the conclusion that nothing protects so surely as majesty. He might have added, "and the love of the people." But this phrase had been so frequently repeated to him at Metz during his illness, that he imagined he could not repeat it now without being guilty of plagiarism.

The dauphiness, for whom the sight was a new one, and who at heart perhaps wished to see it, assumed her plaintive look, and wore it during the whole way to the ceremony—which disposed public opinion very favourably towards her.

Madame Dubarry was brave. She possessed that confidence which is given by youth and beauty. Besides, had not everything been said that could be said of her? What could be added now? She appeared radiant with beauty, as if the splendour of her august lover had been reflected upon her.

The Duke d'Aiguillon marched boldly among the peers who preceded the king. His noble and impressive countenance betrayed no symptoms of grief or discontent, nor did he bear himself triumphantly. To see him

walking thus, none would have guessed that the struggle of the king with his parliament was on his account.

The crowd pointed him out in the crowd, terrible glances were darted at him from the parliament, and that was all. The great hall of the Palais was crammed to overflowing; actors and spectators together made a total of more than three thousand persons.

Outside the Palais the crowd, kept in order by the staves of the officers, and the batons and maces of the archers, gave token of its presence only by that indescribable hum which is not a voice, which articulates nothing, but which nevertheless makes itself heard, and which may justly be called the sound of the popular flood.

The same silence reigned in the great hall, when, the sound of footsteps having ceased, and every one having taken his place, the king, majestic and gloomy, had commanded his chancellor to begin the proceedings.

The parliament knew beforehand what the bed of justice held in reserve for them. They fully understood why they had been convoked. They were to hear the unmitigated expression of the royal will; but they knew the patience, not to say the timidity, of the king, and if they feared, it was rather for the consequences of the bed of justice than for the sitting itself.

The chancellor commenced his address. He was an excellent orator; his exordium was clever, and the amateurs of a demonstrative style found ample scope for study in it. As it proceeded, however, the speech degenerated into a tirade so severe, that all the nobility had a smile on their lips, while the parliament felt very ill at ease.

The king, by the mouth of his chancellor, ordered them to cut short the affairs of Brittany, of which he had had enough. He commanded them to be reconciled to the Duke d'Aiguillon, whose services pleased him; and not to interrupt the service of justice, by which means everything should go on as in that happy period of the golden age, when the flowing streams murmured judicial or argumentative discourses, when the trees were loaded with bags of law papers, placed within reach of the lawyers and attorneys, who had the right to pluck them as fruit belonging to them.

These flippancies did not reconcile the parliament to the Lord Chancellor, nor to the Duke d'Aiguillon. But the speech had been made, and all reply was impossible.

The members of the parliament, although scarcely able to contain their vexation, assumed, with that admirable unity which gives so much strength to constituted bodies, a calm and indifferent demeanour, which highly displeased his majesty and the aristocratic world upon the platform.

The dauphiness turned pale with anger. For the first time she found herself in the presence of popular resistance, and she coldly calculated its power. She had come to this bed of justice with the intention of opposing, at least by her look, the resolution which was about to be adopted there, but gradually she felt herself drawn to make common cause with those of her own caste and race, so that in proportion as the chancellor attacked the parliament more severely, this proud young creature was indignant to find his words so weak. She fancied she could have found words which would have made this assembly start like a troop of oxen under the goad. In short, she found the chancellor too feeble and the parliament too strong.

Louis XV. was a physiognomist, as all selfish people would be if they were not sometimes idle as well as selfish. He cast a glance around to observe the effect of his will, expressed in words which he thought toler-

ably eloquent. The paleness and the compressed lips of the dauphiness showed him what was passing in her mind. As a counterpoise, he turned to look at Madame Dubarry; but instead of the victorious smile he hoped to find there, he only saw an anxious desire to attract the king's looks, as if to judge what he thought.

Nothing intimidates weak minds so much as being forestalled by the wills and minds of others. If they find themselves observed by those who have already taken a resolution, they conclude that they have not done enough—that they are about to be, or have been, ridiculous—that people had a right to expect more than they have done.

Then they pass to extremes; the timid man becomes furious, and a sudden manifestation betrays the effect of this reaction produced by fear upon a fear less powerful than itself.

The king had no need to add a single word to those his chancellor had already spoken; it was not according to etiquette—it was not even necessary. But on this occasion he was possessed of the babbling demon, and, making a sign with his hand, he signified that he intended to speak.

Immediately attention was changed to stupor.

The heads of the members of parliament were all seen to wheel round towards the bed of justice, with the precision of a file of soldiers upon drill. The princes, peers, and military felt uneasy. It was not impossible that after so many excellent things had been said, his most Christian majesty might add something which, to say the least, would be quite useless. Their respect prevented them from giving any other title to the words which might fall from the royal lips.

M. de Richelieu, who had affected to keep aloof from his nephew, was now seen to approach the most stubborn of the parliamentarians, and exchange a glance of mysterious intelligence. But his glances, which were becoming rebellious, met the penetrating eye of Madame Dubarry. Richelieu possessed, as no one else did, the precious power of transition; he passed easily from the satirical to the admiring tone, and chose the beautiful countess as the point of intersection between these two extremes. He sent a smile of gallantry and congratulation, therefore, to Madame Dubarry in passing, but the latter was not duped by it; the more so that the old marshal, who had commenced a correspondence with the parliament and the opposing princes, was obliged to continue it, that he might not appear what he really was.

What sights there are in a drop of water—that ocean for an observer! What centuries in a second—that indescribable eternity! All we have related took place while Louis was preparing to speak, and was opening his lips.

"You have heard," said he, in a firm voice, "what my chancellor has told you of my wishes. Prepare, therefore, to execute them, for such are my intentions, and I shall never change them!"

Louis XV. uttered these last words with the noise and force of a thunderbolt. The whole assembly was literally thunderstruck.

A shudder passed over the parliament, and was quickly communicated like an electric spark to the crowd. A like thrill was felt by the partisans of the king. Surprise and admiration were on every face and in every heart.

The dauphiness involuntarily thanked the king by a lightning glance from her beautiful eyes. Madame Dubarry, electrified, could not refrain from rising, and would have clapped her hands, but for the very natural

fear of being stoned as she left the house, or of receiving hundreds of couplets the next morning, each more odious than the other.

Louis could from this moment enjoy his triumph. The parliament bent low, still with the same unanimity. The king rose from his embroidered cushions. Instantly the captain of the guards, the commandant of the household, and all the gentlemen of the king's suite, rose. Drums beat and trumpets sounded outside. The almost silent stir of the people on the arrival was now changed into a deep murmur, which died away in the distance, repressed by the soldiers and archers.

The king proudly crossed the hall, without seeing anything on his way but humbled foreheads. The Duke d'Aiguillon still preceded his majesty, without abusing his triumph.

The chancellor, having reached the door of the hall, saw the immense crowd of people extending on all sides, and heard their execrations, which reached his ears notwithstanding the distance. He trembled, and said to the archers :

"Close around me."

M. de Richelieu bowed low to the Duke d'Aiguillon as he passed, and whispered :

"These heads are very low, duke—some day or other they will rise devilish high. Take care !"

Madame Dubarry was passing at the moment, accompanied by her brother, the Marchioness de Mirepoix, and several ladies. She heard the marshal's words, and as she was more inclined to repartee than malice, she said :

"Oh, there is nothing to fear, marshal ; did you not hear his majesty's words? The king, I think, said he would never change."

"Terrible words, indeed, madame," replied the duke with a smile ; "but happily for us, these poor parliament men did not remark that whilst saying he would never change, the king looked at you."

And he finished this compliment with one of those inimitable bows which are no longer seen, even upon the stage.

Madame Dubarry was a woman, and by no means a politician. She only saw the compliment, where D'Aiguillon detected plainly the epigram and the threat. Therefore she replied with a smile, while her ally turned pale and bit his lips with vexation, to see the marshal's anger endure so long.

The effect of the bed of justice was for the moment favourable to the royal cause. But it frequently happens that a great blow only stuns, and it is remarked that after the stunning effect has passed away, the blood circulates with more vigour and purity than before. Such at least were the reflections made by a little group of plainly-dressed persons, who were stationed as spectators at the corner of the Quai aux Fleurs and the Rue de la Barillerie, on seeing the king attended by his brillant cortége leave the hall.

They were three in number. Chance had brought them together at this corner, and from thence they seemed to study with interest the impressions of the crowd ; and, without knowing each other, after once exchanging a few words, they had discussed the sitting even before it was over.

"These passions are well ripened," said one of them, an old man with bright eyes, and a mild and honest expression. "A bed of justice is a great work."

"Yes,' replied a young man, smiling bitterly ; "yes, if the work realise the title."

"Sir," replied the old man, turning round, "I think I should know you—I fancy I have seen you before."

"On the night of the 31st May. You are not mistaken, Monsieur Rousseau."

"Oh! you are that young surgeon—my countryman, Monsieur Marat!"

"Yes, sir; at your service."

The two men exchanged salutations. The third had not yet spoken. He was also young, eminently handsome, and aristocratic in his appearance, and during the whole ceremony had unceasingly observed the crowd. The young surgeon moved away the first, and plunged into the densest masses of the people, who, less grateful than Rousseau, had already forgotten him, but whose memory he calculated upon refreshing one day or other.

The other young man waited until he was gone, and then, addressing Rousseau:

"Sir," said he, "you do not go!"

"Oh! I am too old to venture amongst such a mob."

"In that case," said the unknown, lowering his voice, "I will see you again this evening in the Rue Plâtrière, Monsieur Rousseau—do not fail."

The philosopher started as if a phantom had risen before him. His complexion, always pale, became livid. He made an effort to reply to this strange appeal, but the man had already disappeared.

CHAPTER C.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE WORDS OF THE UNKNOWN UPON J. J. ROUSSEAU.

ON hearing these singular words spoken by a man whom he did not know, Rousseau, trembling and unhappy, plunged into the crowd; and without remembering that he was old and naturally timid, elbowed his way through it. He soon reached the bridge of Notre-Dame; then, still plunged in his reverie, and muttering to himself, he crossed the quarter of La Grève, which was the shortest way to his own dwelling.

"So," said he to himself, "this secret, which the initiated guard at the peril of their lives, is in possession of the first comer. This is what mysterious associations gain by passing through the popular sieve. A man recognises me, who knows that I shall be his associate, perhaps his accomplice, yonder. Such a state of things is absurd and intolerable."

And, while he spoke, Rousseau walked forward quickly—he, usually so cautious, especially since his accident in the Rue Ménil-Montant.

"Thus," continued the philosopher, "I must wish, forsooth, to sound to the bottom these plans of human regeneration which some spirits who boast of the title of 'illuminati' propose to carry out. I was foolish enough to imagine that any good ideas could come from Germany—that land of beer and fog—and may have compromised my name by joining it to those of fools or plotters, whom it will serve as a cloak to shelter their folly. Oh, no, it shall not be thus. No; a flash of lightning has shown me the abyss, and I will not cheerfully throw myself into it."

And Rousseau paused to take breath, resting upon his cane, and standing motionless for a moment.

"Yet it was a beautiful chimera," pursued the philosopher. "Liberty in the midst of slavery—the future conquered without noise and struggle—the snare mysteriously woven while earth's tyrants slept. It was too beautiful! I was a fool to believe it! I will not be the sport of fears, of suspicions, of shadows, which are unworthy of a free spirit and an independent body."

He had got thus far, and was continuing his progress, when the sight of some of M. de Sartines' agents gazing round with their ubiquitous eyes frightened the free spirit, and gave such an impulse to the independent body, that it plunged into the deepest shadows of the pillars under which it was walking.

From these pillars it was not far to the Rue Plâtrière. Rousseau accomplished the distance with the speed of lightning, ascended the stairs to his domicile—breathing like a stag pursued by the hunters—and sank upon a chair, unable to utter a word in answer to all Therese's questions.

At last he recovered sufficiently to account for his emotion; it was the walk, the heat, the news of the king's angry remarks at the bed of justice, the commotion caused by the popular terror—a sort of panic, in short, which had spread amongst all who witnessed what had happened.

Therese grumblingly replied that all that was no reason for allowing the dinner to cool; and, moreover, that a man ought not to be such a soft chicken-hearted wretch as to be frightened at the least noise.

Rousseau could make no reply to this last argument, which he himself had so frequently stated in other terms.

Therese added, that these philosophers, these imaginative people, were all the same; that they always talked very grandly in their writings; they said that they feared nothing; that God and man were very little to them: but, at the slightest barking of the smallest poodle, they cried, "Help!"—at the least feverishness they exclaimed, "Oh, heavens! I am dead."

This was one of Therese's favourite themes, that which most excited her eloquence, and to which Rousseau, who was naturally timid, found it most difficult to reply. Rousseau, therefore, pursued his own thoughts to the sound of this discordant music—thoughts which were certainly well worth Therese's, notwithstanding the abuse the lattered showered so plentifully on him.

"Happiness," said he, "is composed of perfume and music; now, noise and odour are conventional things. Who can prove that the onion smells less sweet than the rose, or the peacock sings less melodiously than the nightingale?"

After which axiom, which might pass for an excellent paradox, they sat down to table.

After dinner, Rousseau did not, as usual, sit down to his harpsichord. He paced up and down the apartment, and stopped a hundred times to look out of the window, apparently studying the physiognomy of the Rue Plâtrière. Therese was forthwith seized with one of those fits of jealousy which peevish people—that is to say, the least really jealous people in the world—often indulge in for the sake of opposition. For if there is a disagreeable affectation in the world, it is the affectation of a fault; the affectation of virtue may be tolerated.

Therese, who held Rousseau's age, complexion, mind, and manners in the utmost contempt—who thought him old, sickly, and ugly—did not fear that any one should run off with her husband; she never dreamed that other

women might look upon him with different eyes from herself. But as the torture of jealousy is woman's most dainty punishment, Therese sometimes indulged herself in this treat. Seeing Rousseau, therefore, approach the window so frequently, and observing his dreaming and restless air, she said :

"Very good! I understand your agitation—you have just left some one."

Rousseau turned to her with a startled look which served as an additional proof of the truth of her suspicions.

"Some one you wish to see again," she continued.

"What do you say?" asked Rousseau.

"Yes, we make assignations, it seems!"

"Oh!" said Rousseau, comprehending that Therese was jealous; "an assignation! You are mad, Therese!"

"I know perfectly well that it would be madness in you," said she; "but you are capable of any folly. Go—go, with your papier-mâché complexion, your palpitations, and your coughs—go, and make conquests! It is one way of getting on in the world!"

"But, Therese, you know there is not a word of truth in what you are saying," said Rousseau, angrily; "let me think in peace."

"You are a libertine," said Therese, with the utmost seriousness.

Rousseau reddened as if she had hit the truth, or as if he had received a compliment.

Therese forthwith thought herself justified in putting on a terrible countenance, turning the whole household upside down, slamming the doors violently, and playing with Rousseau's tranquillity, as children with those metal rings which they shut up in a box and shake to make a noise. Rousseau took refuge in his closet; this uproar had rather confused his ideas.

He reflected that there would doubtless be some danger in not being present at the mysterious ceremony of which the stranger had spoken at the corner of the Quai.

"If there are punishments for traitors, there will also be punishments for the lukewarm or careless," thought he. "Now I have always remarked that great dangers mean in reality nothing, just like loud threats. The cases in which either are productive of any result are extremely rare; but petty revenges, underhand attacks, mystifications, and other such small coin —these we must be on our guard against. Some day the masonic brothers may repay my contempt by stretching a string across my staircase; I shall stumble over it and break a leg or the six or eight teeth I have left. Or else they will have a stone ready to fall upon my head when I am passing under a scaffolding; or, better still, there may be some pamphleteer belonging to the fraternity, living quite near me, upon the same floor perhaps, looking from his windows into my room. That is not impossible, since the réunions take place even in the Rue Plâtrière. Well! this wretch will write stupid lampoons on me, which will make me ridiculous all over Paris. Have I not enemies everywhere?"

A moment afterwards Rousseau's thoughts took a different turn.

"Well," said he to himself, "but where is courage? where is honour? Shall I be afraid of myself? Shall I see in my glass only the face of a coward—a slave? No, it shall not be so. If the whole world should combine to ruin me—if the very street should fall upon me—I will go. What pitiable reasoning does fear produce! Since I met this man I have been continually turning in a circle of absurdities. I doubt every

one, and even myself! That is not logical—I know myself, I am not an enthusiast; if I thought I saw wonders in this projected association, it is because there are wonders in it. Who will say I may not be the regenerator of the human race, I, who am sought after, I, whom on the faith of my writings the mysterious agents of an unlimited power have eagerly consulted? Shall I retreat when the time has come to follow up my work, to substitute practice for theory?"

Rousseau became animated.

"What can be more beautiful! Ages roll on; the people rise out of their brutishness; step follows step into the darkness, hand follows hand into the shadows; the immense pyramid is raised, upon the summit of which, as its crowning glory, future ages shall place the bust of Rousseau, citizen of Geneva, who risked his liberty, his life, that he might act as he had spoken—that he might be faithful to his motto: 'Vitam impendere vero.'"

Thereupon Rousseau, in a fit of enthusiasm, seated himself at his harpsichord, and exalted his imagination by the loudest, the most sonorous, and the most warlike melodies he could call forth from its sounding cavity.

Night closed in. Therese, wearied with her vain endeavours to torment her captive, had fallen asleep upon her chair. Rousseau, with beating heart, took his new coat, as if to go out on a pleasure excursion, glanced for a moment in the glass at the play of his black eyes, and was charmed to find that they were sparkling and expressive.

He grasped his knotted stick in his hand, and slipped out of the room without awakening Therese. But when he arrived at the foot of the stairs, and had drawn back the bolt of the street-door, Rousseau paused and looked out, to assure himself as to the state of the locality.

No carriage was passing; the street, as usual, was full of idlers gazing at each other, as they do at this day, while many stopped at the shop windows to ogle the pretty girls. A new-comer would therefore be quite unnoticed in such a crowd. Rousseau plunged into it; he had not far to go. A ballad-singer, with a cracked violin, was stationed before the door which had been pointed out to him. This music, to which every true Parisian's ear is extremely sensitive, filled the street with echoes which repeated the last bars of the air sung by the violin or by the singer himself. Nothing could be more unfavourable, therefore, to the free passage along the street than the crowd gathered at this spot, and the passers-by were obliged to turn either to the right or left of the group. Those who turned to the left took the centre of the street, those to the right brushed along the side of the house indicated, and *vice versa*.

Rousseau remarked that several of these passers-by disappeared on the way as if they had fallen into some trap. He concluded that these people had come with the same purpose as himself, and determined to imitate their manœuvre. It was not difficult to accomplish. Having stationed himself in the rear of the assembly of listeners, as if to join their number, he watched the first person whom he saw entering the open alley. More timid than they, probably because he had more to risk, he waited until a particularly favourable opportunity should present itself.

He did not wait long. A cabriolet, which drove along the street, divided the circle, and caused the two hemispheres to fall back upon the houses on either side. Rousseau thus found himself driven to the very entrance of the passage; he had only to walk on. Our philosopher observed that all the idlers were looking at the cabriolet and had turned their backs on

the house ; he took advantage of this circumstance, and disappeared in the dark passage.

After advancing a few steps he perceived a lamp, beneath which a man was seated quietly, like a stall-keeper after the day's business was over, and read, or seemed to read, a newspaper. At the sound of Rousseau's footsteps this man raised his head and visibly placed his finger upon his breast, upon which the lamp threw a strong light. Rousseau replied to this symbolic gesture by raising his finger to his lips.

The man then immediately rose, and, pushing open a door at his right hand, which door was so artificially concealed in the wooden panel of which it formed a part as to be wholly invisible, he showed Rousseau a very steep staircase, which descended underground. Rousseau entered, and the door closed quickly but noiselessly after him.

The philosopher descended the steps slowly, assisted by his cane. He thought it rather disrespectful that the brothers should cause him, at this, his first interview, to run the risk of breaking his neck or his legs.

But the stair, if steep, was not long. Rousseau counted seventeen steps and then felt as if suddenly plunged into a highly-heated atmosphere.

This moist heat proceeded from the breath of a considerable number of men who were assembled in the low hall. Rousseau remarked that the walls were tapestried with red and white drapery, on which figures of various implements of labour, rather symbolic doubtless than real, were depicted. A single lamp hung from the vaulted ceiling, and threw a gloomy light upon the faces of those present, who were conversing with each other on the wooden benches, and who wore the appearance of honest and respectable citizens.

The floor was neither polished nor carpeted, but was covered with a thick mat of plaited rushes which deadened the sound of the footsteps. Rousseau's entrance, therefore, produced no sensation. No one seemed to have remarked it.

Five minutes previously Rousseau had longed for nothing so much as such an entrance ; and yet, when he had entered, he felt annoyed that he had succeeded so well. He saw an unoccupied place on one of the back benches, and installed himself as modestly as possible on this seat, behind all the others.

He counted thirty-three heads in the assembly. A desk, placed upon a platform, seemed to wait for a president.

CHAPTER CI.

THE HOUSE IN THE RUE PLATRIERE.

ROUSSEAU remarked that the conversation of those present was very cautious and reserved. Many did not open their lips ; and scarcely three or four couples exchanged a few words.

Those who did not speak endeavoured even to conceal their faces, which was not difficult—thanks to the great body of shadow cast by the platform of the expected president. The refuge of these last, who seemed to be the timid individuals of the assembly, was behind this platform. But, in return, two or three members of this corporation gave themselves a great

deal of trouble to recognise their colleagues. They came and went, talked among themselves, and frequently disappeared through a door before which was drawn a black curtain, ornamented with red flames.

In a short time a bell was rung. A man immediately rose from the end of the bench upon which he was seated, and where he was previously confounded with the other freemasons, and took his place upon the platform.

After making some signs with the hands and fingers, which were repeated by all those present, and adding a last sign more explicit than the others, he declared the sitting commenced.

This man was entirely unknown to Rousseau. Beneath the exterior of a working man in easy circumstances, he concealed great presence of mind, aided by an elocution as flowing as could have been wished for in an orator.

His speech was brief, and to the point. He declared that the lodge had been assembled to proceed to the election of a new brother.

"You will not be surprised," said he, "that we have assembled you in a place where the usual trials cannot be attempted. These trials have seemed useless to the chiefs; the brother whom we are to receive to-day is one of the lights of contemporary philosophy—a thoughtful spirit who will be devoted to us from conviction, not from fear. One who has discovered all the mysteries of nature and of the human heart cannot be treated in the same manner as the simple mortal from whom we demand the help of his arm, his will, and his gold. In order to have the co-operation of his distinguished mind, of his honest and energetic character, his promise and his assent are sufficient."

The speaker, when he had concluded, looked round to mark the effect of his words.

Upon Rousseau the effect had been magical; the Genevese philosopher was acquainted with the preparatory mysteries of freemasonry, and looked upon them with the repugnance natural to enlightened minds. The concessions, absurd because they were useless, which the chiefs required from the candidates, this simulating fear when every one knew there was nothing to fear, seemed to him to be the acme of puerility and senseless superstition.

Besides this, the timid philosopher, an enemy to all personal exhibitions and manifestations, would have felt most unhappy had he been obliged to serve as a spectacle for people whom he did not know, and who would have certainly mystified him more or less.

To dispense with these trials in his case was therefore more than a satisfaction to him. He knew the strictness with which equality was enforced by the masonic principles, therefore an exception in his favour constituted a triumph.

He was preparing to say some words in reply to the gracious address of the president, when a voice was heard among the audience.

"At least," said this voice, which was sharp and discordant, "since you think yourself obliged to treat in this princely fashion a man like ourselves, since you dispense in his case with physical pains, as if the pursuit of liberty through bodily suffering were not one of our symbols, we hope you will not confer a precious title upon an unknown person without having questioned him according to the usual ritual, and without having received his profession of faith."

Rousseau turned round to discover the features of the aggressive person who so rudely jostled his triumphant car, and with the greatest surprise recognised the young surgeon whom he had that morning met upon the

Quai-aux-Fleurs. A conviction of his own honesty of purpose, perhaps also a feeling of disdain for the *precious title*, prevented him from replying.

"You have heard?" said the president, addressing Rousseau.

"Perfectly," replied the philosopher, who trembled slightly at the sound of his voice as it echoed through the vaulted roof of the dark hall, "and I am the more surprised at the interpellation when I see from whom it proceeds. What! A man whose profession it is to combat what is called physical suffering, and to assist his brethren, who are common men as well as freemasons, preaches the utility of physical suffering! He chooses a singular path through which to lead the creature to happiness, the sick to health."

"We do not here speak of this or that person," replied the young man warmly; "I am supposed to be unknown to the candidate, and he to me. I am merely the utterer of an abstract truth, and I assert that the chief has done wrong in making an exception in favour of any one. I do not recognise in him," pointing to Rousseau, "the philosopher, and he must not recognise the surgeon in me. We shall perhaps walk side by side through life, without a look or gesture betraying our intimacy, which nevertheless, thanks to the laws of the association, is more binding than all vulgar friendships. I repeat, therefore, that if it has been thought well to spare this candidate the usual trials, he ought at least to have the usual questions put to him."

Rousseau made no reply. The president saw depicted on his features disgust at this discussion, and regret at having engaged in the enterprise.

"Brother," said he authoritatively to the young man, "you will please be silent when the chief speaks, and do not venture on light grounds to blame his actions, which are sovereign here."

"I have a right to speak," replied the young man, more gently.

"To speak, yes; but not to blame. The brother who is about to enter our association is so well known that we have no wish to add to our masonic relations a ridiculous and useless mystery. All the brothers here present know his name, and his name itself is a perfect guarantee. But as he himself, I am certain, loves equality, I request him to answer the question which I shall put to him merely for form:

"What do you seek in this association?"

Rousseau made two steps forward in advance of the crowd, and his dreamy and melancholy eye wandered over the assembly.

"I seek," said he, "that which I do not find—truths, not sophisms. Why should you surround me with poniards which do not wound, with poisons which are only clear water, and with traps under which mattresses are spread? I know the extent of human endurance. I know the vigour of my physical frame. If you were to destroy it, it would not be worth your while to elect me a brother, for when dead I could be of no use to you. Therefore you do not wish to kill me, still less to wound me; and all the doctors in the world would not make me approve of an initiation in the course of which my limbs had been broken. I have served a longer apprenticeship to pain than any of you; I have sounded the body, and probed even to the soul. If I consented to come amongst you when I was *solicited*"—and he laid particular emphasis on the word—"it was because I thought I might be useful. I give, therefore; I do not receive. Alas! before you could do anything to defend me, before you could restore me to liberty were I imprisoned—before you could give me bread if I were starving, or consolation if I were afflicted—before, I repeat, you could do anything—the brother whom you admit to-day, if this gentleman," turning

to Marat, "permits it—this brother will have paid the last tribute of nature; for progress is halting, light is slow, and from the grave into which he will be thrown, none of you can raise him."

"You are mistaken, illustrious brother," said a mild and penetrating voice which charmed Rousseau's ear; "there is more than you think in the association into which you are about to enter; there is the whole future destiny of the world. The future, you are aware, is hope—is science; the future is God, who will give His light to the world, since He has promised to give it, and God cannot lie."

Astonished at this elevated language, Rousseau looked around and recognised the young man who had made the appointment with him in the morning at the Bed of Justice. This man, who was dressed in black with great neatness, and, above all, with a marked air of distinction in his appearance, was leaning against the side of the platform, and his face, illumined by the lamp, shone in all its beauty, grace, and expressiveness.

"Ah!" said Rousseau, "science—the bottomless abyss! *You* speak to me of science, consolation, futurity, hope; another speaks of matter, of rigour, and of violence; whom shall I believe? Shall it be then, in this assembly of brothers, as it is amongst the devouring wolves of the world which stirs above us? Wolves and sheep! Listen to my profession of faith, since you have not read it in my books."

"Your books!" exclaimed Marat. "They are sublime—I confess it—but they are Utopias. You are useful in the same point of view as Pythagoras, Solon, and Cicero the sophist. You point out the good, but it is an artificial, unsubstantial, unattainable good. You are like one who would feed a hungry crowd with air-bubbles, more or less illumined by the sun."

"Have you ever seen," said Rousseau, frowning, "great commotions of nature take place without preparation? Have you seen the birth of a man—that common and yet sublime event? Have you not seen him collect substance and life in the womb of his mother for nine months? Ah! you wish me to regenerate the world with actions. That is not to regenerate, sir; it is to revolutionise!"

"Then," retorted the young surgeon, violently, "you do not wish for independence; you do not wish for liberty!"

"On the contrary," replied Rousseau, "independence is my idol—liberty is my goddess. But I wish for a mild and radiant liberty—a liberty which warms and vivifies. I wish for an equality which will connect men by ties of friendship, not by fear. I wish for education, for the instruction of each element of the social body, as the mechanic wishes for harmonious movement—as the cabinet-maker wishes for the perfect exactness, for the closest fitting, in each piece of his work. I repeat it, I wish for that which I have written—progress, concord, devotion."

A smile of disdain flitted over Marat's lips.

"Yes," he said, "rivulets of milk and honey, Elysian fields like Virgil's poetic dreams, which philosophy would make a reality."

Rousseau made no reply. It seemed to him too hard that he should have to defend his moderation—he, whom all Europe called a violent innovator.

He took his seat in silence, after having satisfied his ingenuous and timid mind by appealing for and obtaining the tacit approbation of the person who had just before defended him.

The president rose.

"You have all heard?" said he.

"Yes," replied the entire assembly.

"Does the candidate appear to you worthy of entering the association, and does he comprehend its duties?"

"Yes," replied the assembly again; but this time with a reserve which did not evince much unanimity.

"Take the oath," said the president to Rousseau.

"It would be disagreeable to me," said the philosopher, with some pride, "to displease any members of this association; and I must repeat the words I made use of just now, as they are the expression of my earnest conviction. If I were an orator, I would put them in a more eloquent manner; but my organ of speech is rebellious, and always betrays my thoughts when I ask it for an immediate translation. I wish to say that I can do more for the world and for you out of this assembly, than I could were I strictly to follow your usages. Leave me, therefore, to my work, to my weakness, to my loneliness. I have told you I am descending to the grave; grief, infirmity, and want hurry me on. You cannot delay this great work of nature. Abandon me; I am not made for the society of men; I hate and fly them. Nevertheless, I serve them, because I am a man myself; and in serving them I fancy them better than they are. Now you have my whole thoughts; I shall not say another word."

"Then you refuse to take the oath?" said Marat, with some emotion.

"I refuse positively; I do not wish to join the association. I see too many convincing proofs to assure me that I should be useless to it."

"Brother," said the unknown personage with the conciliatory voice, "allow me to call you so, for we are brothers, independently of all combinations of the human mind—brother! do not give way to a very natural feeling of irritation; sacrifice your legitimate pride; do for us what is repulsive to yourself. Your advice, your ideas, your presence, are light to our paths. Do not plunge us in the twofold darkness of your absence and your refusal."

"You are in error," said Rousseau; "I take nothing from you, since I should never have given you more than I have given to the whole world —to the first chance reader—to the first consulter of the journals. If you wish for the name and essence of Rousseau——"

"We do wish for them!" said several voices, politely.

"Then make a collection of my books; place them upon the table of your president; and when you are taking the opinions of the meeting, and my turn to give one comes, open my books—you will find my counsel and my vote there."

Rousseau made a step towards the door.

"Stop one moment!" said the surgeon; "mind is free, and that of the illustrious philosopher more than any other; but it would not be regular to have allowed a stranger even to enter our sanctuary, who, not being bound by any tacit agreement, might, without dishonesty, reveal our mysteries."

Rousseau smiled compassionately.

"You want an oath of secresy?" said he.

"You have said it."

"I am ready."

"Be good enough to read the formula, venerable brother," said Marat.

The venerable brother read the following form of oath:

"I swear, in the presence of the Eternal God, the Architect of the Universe, and before my superiors, and the respectable assembly which surrounds me, never to reveal or to make known, or write anything which has happened in my presence, under penalty, in case of indiscretion, of

being punished according to the laws of the Great Founder, of my superiors, and the anger of my fathers."

Rousseau had already raised his hand to swear, when the unknown, who had followed the progress of the debate with a sort of authority which no one seemed to dispute, although he was not distinguished from the crowd, approached the president, and whispered some words in his ear.

"True," said the venerable chief, and he added:

"You are a man, not a brother; you are a man of honour, placed towards us only in the position of a fellow-man. We here abjure, therefore, our distinguishing peculiarity, and ask from you merely your word of honour to forget what has passed between us."

"Like a dream of the morning—I swear it upon my honour," said Rousseau, with emotion.

With these words he retired, and many of the members followed him.

CHAPTER CII.

THE REPORT.

WHEN the members of the second and third orders had gone, seven associates remained in the lodge. They were the seven chiefs. They recognised each other by means of signs which proved their initiation to a superior degree.

Their first care was to close the doors. Then their president made himself known by displaying a ring, on which were engraved the mysterious letters, L. P. D.*

This president was charged with the most important correspondence of the order. He was in communication with the six other chiefs, who dwelt in Switzerland, Russia, America, Sweden, Spain, and Italy.

He brought with him some of the most important documents he had received from his colleagues, in order to communicate their contents to the superior circles of initiated brothers, who were above the others but beneath him.

We have already recognised this chief: it was Balsamo.

The most important of the letters contained a threatening advice. It was from Sweden, and written by Swedenborg.

"Watch the south, brothers," he said; "under its burning rays has been hatched a traitor who will ruin you.

"Watch in Paris, brothers—the traitor dwells there: he possesses the secrets of the order, a feeling of hatred urges him on.

"A murmuring voice, a rustling flight, whispers the denunciation in my ear. I see a terrible vengeance coming, but perhaps it will be too late. In the meantime, brothers, watch! watch! A traitorous tongue, even though it be uninstructed, is sometimes sufficient to overthrow our most skilfully-constructed plans."

The brothers looked at each other in mute surprise. The language of the fierce old sage, his prescience, which had acquired an imposing authority from many striking examples, contributed in no small degree to cast

* Lilia pedibus destruc.

a gloom over the meeting at which Balsamo presided. Balsamo himself, who placed implicit faith in Swedenborg's second sight, could not resist the saddening influence which this letter had on the assembly.

"Brothers," said he, "the inspired prophet is rarely deceived. Watch. then, as he bids you. You know now, as I do, that the struggle commences. Let us not be conquered by these ridiculous enemies, whose power we sap in the utmost security. You must not forget that they have mercenary swords at their command. It is a powerful weapon in this world, among those who do not see beyond the limits of our terrestrial life. Brothers, let us distrust these hired traitors."

"These fears seem to me puerile," said a voice; "we gather strength daily, and we are directed by brilliant genius and powerful hands."

Balsamo bowed his thanks for the flattering eulogy.

"Yes, but as our illustrious president has said, treason creeps everywhere," replied a brother, who was no other than the surgeon Marat, promoted, notwithstanding his youth, to a superior grade, in virtue of which he now sat for the first time on a consulting committee. "Remember, brothers, that by doubling the bait, you make a more important capture. If M. de Sartines with a bag of crown-pieces can purchase the revelations of one of our obscurer brothers, the minister, with a million, or with holding out the hope of advancement, may buy over one of our superiors. Now, with us, the obscurer brother knows nothing. At the most he is cognizant of the names of some of his colleagues, and these names signify nothing. Ours is an excellent constitution, but it is an eminently aristocratic one: the inferiors know nothing, can do nothing. They are called together to say or to hear trifles, and yet they contribute their time and their money to increase the solidity of our edifice. Reflect that the workman brings only the stone and the mortar, but without stone and mortar could you build the house? Now, the workman receives a very small salary, but I consider him equal to the architect who plans, creates, and superintends the whole work; and I consider him equal because he is a man, and in the eyes of a philosopher, one man is worth as much as another, seeing that he bears his misfortunes and his fate equally, and because, even more than another man, he is exposed to the fall of a stone or the breaking of a scaffold."

"I must interrupt you, brother," said Balsamo. "You diverge from the question which alone ought to occupy our thoughts. Your failing, brother, is that you are over zealous, and apt to generalise discussions. Our business on the present occasion is not to decide whether our constitution be good or bad, but to uphold the integrity of that constitution in all its strength. If I wished, however, to discuss the point with you, I would answer, no; the instrument which receives the impulse is not equal to the architect; the brain is not the equal of the arm."

"Suppose M. de Sartines should seize one of our least important brethren," cried Marat warmly, "would he not send him to rot in the Bastille equally with you or me?"

"Granted; but the misfortune in that case is for the individual only, not for the order, which is with us the all-important point. If, on the contrary, the chief were imprisoned, the whole conspiracy is at an end. When the general is absent, the army loses the battle. Therefore, brother, watch over the safety of the chiefs!"

"Yes, but let them in return watch over ours."

"That is their duty."

"And let their faults be doubly punished."

"Again, brother, you wander from the constitution of the order. Have

you forgotten that the oath which binds all the members of the associations is the same, and threatens all with the same punishment?"

"The great ones always escape."

"That is not the opinion of the great themselves, brother. Listen to the conclusion of the letter which one of the greatest among us, our prophet Swedenborg, has written. This is what he adds:

"'The blow will come from one of the mighty ones, one of the mightiest of the order; or, if it comes not directly from him, the fault will be traceable to him. Remember that fire and water may be accomplices; one gives light, the other revelation.

"'Watch, brothers, over all and over each, watch!'

"Then," said Marat, seizing upon those points in Balsamo's speech and Swedenborg's letter which suited his purpose, "let us repeat the oath which binds us together, and let us pledge ourselves to maintain it in its utmost vigour, whosoever he may be who shall betray us, or be the cause of our betrayal."

Balsamo paused for a moment, and then, rising from his seat, he pronounced the consecrated words, with which our readers are already acquainted, in a slow, solemn, terrible voice:

"In the name of the crucified Son, I swear to break all the bonds of nature which unite me to father, mother, brother, sister, wife, relation, friend, mistress, king, benefactor, and to any being whatsoever to whom I have promised faith, obedience, gratitude, or service.

"I swear to reveal to the chief, whom I acknowledge according to the statutes of the order, all that I have seen or done, read or guessed, and even to search out and penetrate that which may not of itself be openly present to my eyes.

"I will honour poison, steel, and fire, as a means of ridding the world, by death or idiocy, of the enemies of truth and liberty.

"I subscribe to the law of silence. I consent to die, as if struck by lightning, on the day when I shall have merited this punishment, and I await, without murmuring, the knife which will reach me in whatsoever part of the world I may be."

Then, the seven men who composed this solemn assembly repeated the oath, word for word, standing, and with uncovered heads.

When the words of the oath had been repeated by all:

"We are now guaranteed against treachery," said Balsamo; "let us no longer mingle extraneous matter with our discussion. I have to make my report to the committee of the principal events of the year.

"My summary of the affairs of France may have interest for enlightened and zealous minds like yours; I will commence with it.

"France is situated in the centre of Europe, as the heart in the centre of the body; it lives, and radiates life. It is in its palpitations that we must look for the cause of all the disorder in the general organization.

"I came to France, therefore, and approached Paris as a physician approaches the heart. I listened, I felt, I experimented. When I entered it a year ago, the monarchy harassed it; to-day, vices kill it. I required to hasten the effect of these fatal debauches, and therefore I assisted them.

"An obstacle was in my way; this obstacle was a man, not only the first, but the most powerful man in the state, next to the king.

"He was gifted with some of those qualities which please other men. He was too proud, it is true, but his pride was applied to his works. He knew how to lighten the hardships of the people by making them believe

and even feel sometimes that they were a portion of the state; and by sometimes consulting them on their grievances, he raised a standard around which the mass will always rally—the spirit of nationality.

"He hated the English, the natural enemies of the French; he hated the favourite, the natural enemy of the working classes. Now, if this man had been a usurper—if he had been one of us—if he would have trodden in our path, acted for our ends—I would have assisted him, I would have kept him in power, I would have upheld him by the resources I am able to create for my protegées; for, instead of patching up decayed royalty, he would have assisted us in overthrowing it on the appointed day. But he belonged to the aristocracy; he was born with a feeling of respect for that first rank to which he could not aspire, for the monarchy, which he dared not attack; he served royalty while despising the king; he did worse—he acted as a shield to this royalty against which our blows were directed. The parliament and the people, full of respect for this living dyke which opposed itself to any encroachment on the royal prerogative, limited themselves to a moderate resistance, certain as they were of having in him a powerful assistant when the moment should arrive.

"I understood the position—I undertook M. de Choiseul's fall.

"This laborious task, at which for ten years so much hatred and interest had laboured in vain, I commenced and terminated in a few months, by means which it would be useless to reveal to you. By a secret, which constitutes one of my powers—a power the greater, because it will remain eternally hidden from the eyes of all, and will manifest itself only by its effects—I overthrew and banished M. de Choiseul, and attached to his overthrow a long train of regret, disappointment, lamentation, and anger.

"You see now that my labour bears its fruit; all France asks for Choiseul, and rises to demand him back, as orphans turn to heaven when God has taken away their earthly parents.

"The parliament employs the only right it possesses—inertia; it has ceased to act. In a well-organised body, as a state of the first rank ought to be, the paralysis of any essential organ is fatal. Now, the parliament in the social, is what the stomach is in the human body. When the parliament ceases to act, the people—the intestines of the state—can work no longer; and, consequently, must cease to pay, and the gold—that is, the blood—will be wanting.

"There will be a struggle, no doubt; but who can combat against the people? Not the army—that daughter of the people—which eats the bread of the labourer, and drinks the wine of the vine-grower. There remain then the king's household, the privileged classes, the guards, the Swiss, the musketeers—in all, scarce five or six thousand men. What can this handful of pigmies do when the nation shall rise like a giant?"

"Let them rise, then—let them rise!" cried several voices.

"Yes, yes! to the work!" exclaimed Marat.

"Young man, I have not yet consulted you," said Balsamo, coldly. "This sedition of the masses," continued he, "this revolt of the weak, become strong by their number, against the powerful single-handed—less thoughtful, less ripened, less experienced minds would stimulate immediately, and would succeed with a facility which terrifies me; but I have reflected and studied—I have mixed with the people, and, under their dress, with their perseverance, even their coarseness, I have viewed them so closely, that I have made myself, as it were, one of themselves. I know them now; I cannot be deceived in them. They are strong, but ignorant; irritable, but not revengeful. In a word, they are not yet ripe for sedition

such as I mean and wish for. They want the instruction which will make them see events in the double light of example and utility; they want the memory of their past experience.

"They resemble those daring young men whom I have seen in Germany, at the public festivals, eagerly climb a vessel's mast, at the top of which hung a ham and a silver cup. They started at first burning with eagerness, and mounted with surprising rapidity; but when they had almost reached the goal—when they had only to extend the arm to seize their prize—their strength abandoned them, and they slipped to the bottom amid the hootings of the crowd.

"The first time it happened as I told you; the second time they husbanded their strength and their breath; but, taking more time, they failed by their slowness, as they had before failed from too great haste. At last—the third time—they took a middle course between precipitation and delay, and this time they succeeded. This is the plan I propose: efforts—never ceasing efforts—which gradually approach the goal, until the day arrives when infallible success will crown our attempts."

Balsamo ceased, and looked around upon his audience, among whom the passions of youth and inexperience were boiling over.

"Speak, brother," said he to Marat, who was more agitated than the others.

"I will be brief," said he. "Efforts soothe the people when they do not discourage them. Efforts! that is the theory of M. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva, a great poet, but a slow and timid genius—a useless citizen, whom Plato would have driven from his republic! Wait! Ever wait! Since the emancipation of the commons, since the revolt of the *maillotins*—for seven centuries we have waited! Count the generations which have died in the mean time, and then dare to pronounce the fatal word *wait!* as your motto of the future! M. Rousseau speaks to us of opposition, as it was practised in the reign of the Grand Monarque—as Molière practised it in his comedies, Boileau in his satires, and La Fontaine in his fables—whispering it in the ears of marchionesses, and prostrating it at the feet of kings. Poor and feeble opposition, which has not advanced the cause of humanity one jot! Lisping children recite these hidden theories without understanding them, and go to sleep while they recite. Rabelais also was a politician in your sense of the word; but at such politics people laugh, and correct nothing. Have you seen one single abuse redressed for the last three hundred years? Enough of poets and theoreticians! Let us have deeds, not words. We have given France up to the care of physicians for three hundred years, and it is time now that surgery should enter in its turn, scalpel and saw in hand. Society is gangrened: let us stop the gangrene with the steel. He may wait who rises from his table to recline upon a couch of roses, from which the ruffled leaves are blown by the breath of his slaves; for the satisfied stomach exhales grateful vapours which mount into the brain, and recreate and vivify it. But hunger, misery, despair, are not satiated nor consoled with verses, with sentences and fables. They cry out loudly in their sufferings; deaf indeed must he be who does not hear their lamentations—accursed he who does not reply to them! A revolt, even should it be crushed, will enlighten the minds more than a thousand years of precepts, more than three centuries of examples. It will enlighten the kings, if it do not overthrow them. That is much!—that is enough!"

A murmur of admiration rose from several lips.

"Where are our enemies?" pursued Marat. "Above us! Above us!

They guard the doors of the palaces, they surround the steps of the throne. Upon this throne is their palladium, which they guard with more care and with more fear than the Trojans did theirs. This palladium, which makes them all-powerful, rich, and insolent, is royalty. This royalty cannot be reached, save by passing over the bodies of those who guard it, as one can only reach the general by overthrowing the battalion by which he is surrounded. Well! History tells us of many battalions which have been captured—many generals who have been overthrown—from Darius down to King John, from Regulus down to Duguesclin.

"If we overthrow the guard, we reach the idol. Let us begin by striking down the sentinels—we can afterwards strike down the chief. Let the first attack be on the courtiers, the nobility, the aristocracy; the last will be upon the kings. Count the privileged heads; there are scarcely two hundred thousand. Walk through this beautiful garden called France, with a sharp switch in your hand, and cut down these two hundred thousand heads as Tarquin did the poppies of Latium, and all will be done. There will then be only two powers opposed to each other, the people and the kingship. Then let this kingship, the emblem, try to struggle with the people, this giant—and you will see! When dwarfs wish to overthrow a colossus, they commence with the pedestal. When the woodmen wish to cut down the oak, they attack it at the foot. Woodmen! woodmen! seize the hatchet—attack the oak at its roots—and the ancient tree with its proud branches will soon bite the dust!"

"And will crush you like pigmies in its fall, unfortunate wretches that you are!" exclaimed Balsamo, in a voice of thunder. "Ah! you rail against the poets, and you speak in metaphors even more poetical and more imaginative than theirs! Brother! brother!" continued he, addressing Marat, "I tell you, you have quoted these sentences from some romance which you are composing in your garret!"

Marat reddened.

"Do you know what a revolution is?" continued Balsamo; "I have seen two hundred, and can tell you. I have seen that of ancient Egypt, that of Assyria, those of Rome and Greece, and that of the Netherlands. I have seen those of the middle ages, when the nations rushed one against the other—East against West, West against East—and murdered without knowing why. From the Shepherd Kings to our own time there have been perhaps a hundred revolutions, and yet now you complain of being slaves. Revolutions, then, have done no good. And why? Because those who caused the revolution were all struck with the same vertigo—they were too hasty. Does God, who presides over the revolutions of the world, as genius presides over the revolutions of men—does He hasten?

"'Cut down the oak!' you cry. And you do not calculate that the oak, which needs but a second to fall, covers as much ground when it falls as a horse at a gallop would cross in thirty seconds. Now, those who throw down the oak, not having time to avoid the unforeseen fall, would be lost, crushed, killed, beneath its immense trunk. That is what you want, is it not? You will never get that from me. I shall be patient. I carry my fate—yours—the world's—in the hollow of this hand. No one can make me open this hand, full of overwhelming truth, unless I wish to open it. There is thunder in it, I know. Well! the thunderbolt shall remain in it, as if hidden in the murky cloud. Brethren! brethren! descend from these sublime heights, and let us once more walk upon the earth.

"Sirs, I tell you plainly, and from my inmost soul, that the time has not yet come. The king who is on the throne is the last reflection of the

great monarch whom the people still venerate ; and in this fading monarchy there is yet something dazzling enough to outweigh the lightning shafts of your petty anger. This man was born a king and will die a king. His race is insolent but pure. You can read his origin on his brow, in his gestures, in his words—he will always be king. Overthrow him, and the same will happen to him as happened to Charles the First—his executioners will kneel before him, and the courtiers who accompanied him in his misfortune, like Lord Capel, will kiss the axe which struck off the head of their master.

"Now, sirs, you all know that England was too hasty. King Charles the First died upon the scaffold, indeed ; but King Charles the Second, his son, died upon the throne.

"Wait, wait, brethren ! for the time will soon be propitious. You wish to destroy the lilies. That is our motto—"Lilia pedibus destrue." But not a single root must leave the flower of Saint Louis the hope of blooming again. You wish to destroy royalty ! to destroy royalty for ever ! You must first weaken her *prestige* as well as her essence. You wish to destroy royalty ! Wait till royalty is no longer a sacred office, but merely a trade—till it is practised in a shop, not in a temple. Now, what is most sacred in royalty—viz., the legitimate transmission of the throne, authorised for centuries by God and the people—is about to be lost for ever. Listen, listen ! This invincible, this impervious barrier between us nothings and these *quasi* divine creatures—this limit which the people have never dared to cross, and which is called legitimacy—this word, brilliant as a lighted watch-tower, and which until now has saved the royal family from shipwreck—this word will be extinguished by the breath of a mysterious fatality !

"The dauphiness—called to France to perpetuate the race of kings by the admixture of imperial blood—the dauphiness, married now for a year to the heir of the French crown—approach, brethren, for I fear to let the sound of my words pass beyond your circle——"

"Well ?" asked the six chiefs, with anxiety.

"Well, brethren, the dauphiness will never have an heir, or if one be born to her, he will die early !"

A sinister murmur, which would have frozen the monarchs of the world with terror had they heard it—such deep hatred, such revengeful joy, did it breathe—escaped like a deadly vapour from the little circle of six heads, which almost touched each other, Balsamo's being bent over them from his rostrum.

"Now, gentlemen, you know this year's work ; you see the progress of our mines. Be assured that we shall only succeed by the genius and the courage of some, who will serve as the eyes and the brain—by the perseverance and labour of others, who will represent the arms—by the faith and the devotion of others again, who will be the heart.

"Above all, remember the necessity of a blind submission, which ordains that even your chief must sacrifice himself to the will of the statutes of the order, whenever those statutes require it.

"After this, gentlemen and beloved brothers, I would dissolve the meeting, if there were not still a good act to perform, an evil to point out.

"The great writer who came among us this evening, and who would have been one of us but for the stormy zeal of one of our brothers who alarmed his timid soul—this great author proved himself in the right before our assembly, and I deplore it as a misfortune that a stranger should be

victorious before a majority of brothers who are imperfectly acquainted with our rules, and utterly ignorant of our aim.

"Rousseau, triumphing over the truths of our association with the sophisms of his books, represents a fundamental vice which I would extirpate by steel and fire, if I had not the hope of curing it by persuasion. The self-love of one of our brothers has developed itself most unfortunately. He has given us the worst in the discussion. No similar fact, I trust, will again present itself, or else I shall have recourse to the laws of discipline.

"In the meantime, gentlemen, propagate the faith by gentleness and persuasion. Insinuate it, do not impose it—do not force it into rebellious minds with wedges and blows, as the inquisitors tortured their victims. Remember that we cannot be great until after we have been acknowledged good; and that we cannot be acknowledged good but by appearing better than those who surround us. Remember, too, that among us, the great, the good, the best, are nothing without science, art, and faith; nothing, in short, compared with those whom God has marked with a peculiar stamp, as if giving them an authority to govern over men and rule empires.

"Gentlemen, the meeting is dissolved."

After pronouncing these words, Balsamo put on his hat and folded himself in his cloak.

Each of the initiated left in his turn, alone and silently, in order not to awaken suspicion.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE BODY AND THE SOUL.

THE last who remained beside the master was Marat, the surgeon. He was very pale, and humbly approached the terrible orator, whose power was unlimited.

"Master," said he, "have I indeed committed a fault?"

"A great one, sir," said Balsamo; "and, what is worse, you do not believe that you have committed one."

"Well! yes, I confess that not only do I not believe that I committed a fault, but I think that I spoke as I ought to have done."

"Pride, pride!" muttered Balsamo; "pride—destructive demon! Men combat the fever in the blood of the patient—they dispel the plague from the water and the air—but they let pride strike such deep roots in their hearts that they cannot exterminate it."

"Oh, master!" said Marat, "you have a very despicable opinion of me. Am I indeed so worthless that I cannot count for anything among my fellows? Have I gathered the fruits of my labour so ill that I cannot utter a word without being taxed with ignorance? Am I such a lukewarm adept that my earnestness is suspected? If I had no other good quality, at least I exist through my devotion to the holy cause of the people."

"Sir," replied Balsamo, "it is because the principle of good yet struggles in you against the principle of evil, which appears to me likely to carry you away one day, that I will try to correct these defects in you. If I can suc-

ceed—if pride has not yet subdued every other sentiment in your breast—I shall succeed in one hour."

"In one hour?" said Marat.

"Yes; will you grant me that time?"

"Certainly."

"Where shall I see you?"

"Master, it is my place to seek you in any place you may choose to point out to your servant."

"Well!" said Balsamo, "I will come to your house."

"Mark the promise you are making, master. I live in an attic in the Rue des Cordeliers. An attic, remember!" said Marat, with an affectation of proud simplicity, with a boasting display of poverty, which did not escape Balsamo; "while you——"

"Well! while I?"

"While you, is is said, inhabit a palace."

Balsamo shrugged his shoulders, as a giant who looks down with contempt on the anger of a dwarf.

"Well, even so, sir," he replied; "I will come to see you in your garret."

"And when, sir?"

"To-morrow."

"At what time?"

"In the morning."

"At daybreak I go to my lecture-room, and from thence to the hospital."

"That is precisely what I want. I would have asked you to take me with you, had you not proposed it."

"But early, remember," said Marat; "I sleep little."

"And I do not sleep at all," replied Balsamo. "At daybreak, then."

"I shall expect you."

Thereupon they separated, for they had reached the door opening on the street, now as dark and solitary as it had been noisy and populous when they entered. Balsamo turned to the left, and rapidly disappeared. Marat followed his example, striding toward the right with his long meagre limbs.

Balsamo was punctual: the next morning, at six o'clock, he knocked at Marat's door, which was the centre one of six, opening on a long corridor which formed the topmost story of an old house in the Rue des Cordeliers.

It was evident that Marat had made great preparations to receive his illustrious guest. The small bed of walnut-tree, and the wooden chest of drawers beside it, shone bright beneath the sturdy arm of the charwoman, who was busily engaged scrubbing the decayed furniture.

Marat himself lent a helping hand to the old woman, and was refreshing the withered flowers which were arranged in a blue delft pot, and which formed the principal ornament of the attic. He still held a duster underneath his arm, which showed that he had not touched the flowers until after having given a rub to the furniture.

As the key was in the door, and as Balsamo had entered without knocking, he interrupted Marat in his occupation. Marat, at the sight of the master, blushed much more deeply than was becoming in a true stoic.

"You see, master," said he, stealthily throwing the tell-tale cloth behind a curtain, "I am a domestic man, and assist this good woman. It is from

preference that I choose this task, which is, perhaps, not quite plebeian, but it is still less aristocratic."

"It is that of a poor young man who loves cleanliness," said Balsamo, coldly, "nothing more. Are you ready, sir? You know my moments are precious."

"I have only to slip on my coat, sir. Dame Grivette, my coat! She is my portress, sir—my footman, my cook, my housekeeper, and she costs me one crown a month."

"Economy is praiseworthy," said Balsamo; "it is the wealth of the poor, and the wisdom of the rich."

"My hat and cane!" said Marat.

"Stretch out your hand," said Balsamo; "there is your hat, and no doubt this cane which hangs beside your hat is yours."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir; I am quite confused."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir. My watch, Dame Grivette!"

Dame Grivette bustled about the room as if in search of something, but did not reply.

"You have no occasion for a watch, sir, to go to the amphitheatre and the hospital; it will perhaps not be easily found, and that would cause some delay."

"But, sir, I attach great value to my watch, which is an excellent one, and which I bought with my savings."

"In your absence, Dame Grivette will look for it," replied Balsamo with a smile; "and if she searches carefully, it will be found when you return."

"Oh, certainly," said Dame Grivette, "it will be found unless monsieur has left it somewhere else. Nothing is lost here."

"You see," said Balsamo. "Come, sir, come!"

Marat did not venture to persist, and followed Balsamo, grumbling.

When they reached the door, Balsamo said:

"Where shall we go first?"

"To the lecture-room, if you please, master; I have marked a subject which must have died last night of acute meningitis. I want to make some observations on the brain, and I do not wish my colleagues to take it from me."

"Then let us go to the amphitheatre, Monsieur Marat."

"Moreover, it is only a few yards from here; the amphitheatre is close to the hospital, and I shall only have to go in for a moment; you may even wait for me at the door."

"On the contrary, I wish to accompany you inside, and hear your opinion of this subject."

"When it was alive, sir?"

"No, since it has become a corpse."

"Take care," said Marat, smiling; "I may gain a point over you, for I am well acquainted with this part of my profession, and am said to be a skilful anatomist."

"Pride! pride! ever pride!" murmured Balsamo.

"What do you say?" asked Marat.

"I say that we shall see, sir," replied Balsamo. "Let us enter."

Marat preceded Balsamo in the narrow alley leading to the amphitheatre, which was situated at the extremity of the Rue Hautefeuille. Balsamo followed him unhesitatingly until they reached a long narrow room, where two corpses, a male and a female, lay stretched upon a marble table.

The woman had died young : the man was old and bald. A soiled sheet was thrown over their bodies, leaving their faces half uncovered.

They were lying side by side upon this cold bed ; they who had perhaps never met before in the world, and whose souls, then voyaging in eternity, must, could they have looked down on earth, have been struck with wonderment at the proximity of their mortal remains.

Marat, with a single movement, raised and threw aside the coarse linen which covered the two bodies, whom death had thus made equal before the anatomist's scalpel.

"Is not the sight of the dead repugnant to your feelings?" asked Marat in his usual boasting manner.

"It makes me sad," replied Balsamo.

"Want of custom" said Marat. "I, who see this sight daily, feel neither sadness nor disgust. We practitioners live with the dead, and do not interrupt any of the functions of our existence on their account."

"It is a sad privilege of your profession, sir."

"Besides," added Marat, "why should I be sad, or feel disgust? In the first case, reflection forbids it ; in the second, custom."

"Explain your ideas," said Balsamo : "I do not understand you clearly. Reflection first."

"Well, why should I be afraid? Why should I fear an inert mass—a statue of flesh instead of stone, marble, or granite?"

"In short, you think there is nothing in a corpse."

"Nothing—absolutely nothing."

"Do you believe that?"

"I am sure of it."

"But in the living body."

"There is motion," said Marat, proudly.

"And the soul?—you do not speak of it, sir."

"I have never found it in the bodies which I have dissected."

"Because you have only dissected corpses."

"Oh no, sir! I have frequently operated upon living bodies."

"And you have found nothing more in them than in the corpses?"

"Yes, I have found pain. Do you call pain the soul?"

"Then you do not believe in it?"

"In what?"

"In the soul?"

"I believe in it, because I am at liberty to call it motion if I wish."

"That is well. You believe in the soul ; that is all I asked ; I am glad you believe in it."

"One moment, master. Let us understand each other, and above all, let us not exaggerate," said Marat, with his serpent smile. "We practitioners are rather disposed to materialism."

"These bodies are very cold," said Balsamo, dreamily, "and this woman was very beautiful."

"Why, yes."

"A lovely soul would have been suitable in this lovely body."

"Ah! there is the mistake in Him who created her. A beautiful scabbard, but a vile sword. This corpse, master, is that of a wretched woman who had just left Saint Lazarus, when she died of cerebral inflammation in the Hotel Dieu. Her history is long, and tolerably scandalous. If you call the motive power which impelled this creature soul you wrong our souls, which must be of the same essence, since they are derived from the same source."

"Her soul should have been cured," said Balsamo; "it was lost for want of the only Physician who is indispensable—the Physician of the Soul."

"Alas, master, that is another of your theories. Medicine is only for the body," replied Marat, with a bitter smile. "Now you have a word on your lips which Molière has often employed in his comedies, and it is this word which makes you smile."

"No," said Balsamo, "you mistake; you cannot guess why I smile. What we concluded just now was, that these corpses are void, was it not?"

"And insensible," added Marat, raising the young woman's head, and letting it fall noisily upon the marble, while the body neither moved nor shuddered.

"Very well," said Balsamo; "let us now go to the hospital."

"Wait one moment, master, I intreat you, until I have separated from the trunk this head, which I am most anxious to have, as it was the seat of a very curious disease. Will you allow me?"

"Do you ask?" said Balsamo.

Marat opened his case, took from it a bistoury, and picked up in a corner a large wooden mallet stained with blood. Then with a practised hand he made a circular incision which separated all the flesh and the muscles of the neck, and having thus reached the bone, he slipped his bistoury between the juncture of the vertebral column, and struck a sharp blow upon it with the mallet.

The head rolled upon the table, and from the table upon the floor; Marat was obliged to seize it with his damp hands. Balsamo turned away, not to give too much joy to the triumphant operator.

"One day," said Marat, who thought he had hit the master in a weak point,—"one day some philanthropist will occupy himself with the details of death as others do of life, and will invent a machine which shall sever a head at a single blow, and cause instantaneous annihilation, which no other instrument of death does. The wheel, quartering, and hanging, are punishments suitable for savages, but not for civilised people. An enlightened nation, as France is, should punish, but not revenge. Those who condemn to the wheel, who hang or quarter, revenge themselves upon the criminal by inflicting pain before punishing him by death, which, in my opinion, is too much by half."

"And in mine also, sir. But what kind of an instrument do you mean?"

"I can fancy a machine cold and impassible as the law itself. The man who is charged with fulfilling the last office is moved at the sight of his fellow man, and sometimes strikes badly, as it happened to the Duke of Monmouth and to Chalais. This could not be the case with a machine—with two arms of oak wielding a cutlass, for instance."

"And do you believe, sir, that because the knife would pass with the rapidity of lightning between the base of the occiput and the trapezoid muscles, that death would be instantaneous, and the pain momentary?"

"Certainly; death would be instantaneous, for the iron would sever the nerves which cause motion at a blow. The pain would be momentary, for the blade would separate the brain, which is the seat of the feelings, from the heart, which is the centre of life."

"Sir," said Balsamo, "the punishment of decapitation exists in Germany."

"Yes, but by the sword; and, as I said before, a man's hand may tremble."

"Such a machine exists in Italy; an arm of oak wields it. It is called the *mannaja*."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, I have seen criminals, decapitated by the executioner, raise their headless bodies from the bench on which they were seated, and stagger five or six paces off where they fell. I have picked up heads which had rolled to the foot of the mannaja, as that head you are holding by the hair has just rolled from the marble table, and on pronouncing in their ears the name by which those persons had been called, I have seen the eyes open again and turn in their orbit, in their endeavours to see who had called them back again to earth."

"A nervous movement—nothing else."

"Are the nerves not the organs of sensibility?"

"What do you conclude from that, sir?"

"I conclude that it would be better, instead of inventing a machine which kills to punish, that man should seek a means of punishing without killing. The society which will invent this means will assuredly be the best and the most enlightened of societies."

"Utopias again! always Utopias!" said Marat.

"Perhaps you are right," said Balsamo; "time will show. But did you not speak of the hospital? Let us go!"

"Come, then," said Marat; and he tied the woman's head in his pocket-handkerchief, carefully knotting the four corners. "Now I am sure, at least," said he, as he left the hall, "that my comrades will only have my leavings."

They took the way to the Hôtel Dieu—the dreamer and the practician, side by side.

"You have cut off this head very coolly and very skilfully, sir," said Balsamo; "do you feel less emotion when you operate upon the living than the dead? Does the sight of suffering affect you more than that of immobility? Have you more pity for living bodies than for corpses?"

"No; that would be as great a fault as for the executioner to be moved. You may kill a man by cutting his thigh unskilfully, just as well as by severing the head from the body. A good surgeon operates with his hand, not with his heart; though he knows well at the same time, in his heart, that for one moment of suffering he gives years of life and health. That is the fair side of our profession, master."

"Yes, sir; but in the living bodies you meet with the soul, I hope."

"Yes, if you will agree with me that the soul is motion, or sensibility. Yes, certainly, I meet with it; and it is very troublesome, too; for it kills far more patients than any scalpel."

They had by this time arrived at the threshold of the Hôtel Dieu, and now entered the hospital. Guided by Marat, who still carried his ominous burden, Balsamo penetrated to the hall where the operations were performed, in which the head-surgeon and the students in surgery were assembled. The attendant had just brought in a young man who had been run over the preceding week by a heavy carriage, the wheel of which had crushed his foot. A hasty operation, performed upon the limb when benumbed by pain, had not been sufficient; the inflammation had rapidly extended, and the amputation of the leg had now become urgent.

The unfortunate man, stretched upon his bed of anguish, looked with a horror which would have melted tigers at the band of eager students who

were watching for the moment of his martyrdom, perhaps of his death, that they might study the science of life—that marvellous phenomenon behind which lies the gloomy phenomenon of death.

He seemed to implore a pitying look, a smile, or a word of encouragement from each of the students and attendants, but the beatings of his heart were responded to only by indifference, his beseeching looks with glances of iron. A surviving emotion of pride kept him silent. He reserved all his strength for the cries which pain would soon wring from him. But when he felt the heavy hand of the attendant upon his shoulder, when the arms of the assistants twined around him like the serpents of Laocoön, when he heard the operator's voice cry, "Courage!" the unfortunate man ventured to break the silence, and asked in a plaintive voice:

"Shall I suffer much?"

"Oh, no, make your mind easy," replied Marat, with a hypocritical smile, which was affectionate to the patient, but ironical to Balsamo.

Marat saw that Balsamo had understood him; he approached and whispered:

"It is a dreadful operation. The bone is full of cracks and fearfully sensitive. He will die, not of the wound, but of the pain. That is what the soul does for this poor man."

"Then why do you operate? why do you not let him die in peace?"

"Because it is the surgeon's duty to attempt a cure, even when the cure seems impossible."

"And you say he will suffer?"

"Fearfully."

"And that his soul is the cause?"

"His soul, which has too much sympathy with the body."

"Then, why not operate upon the soul? Perhaps the tranquillity of the one would cause the cure of the other."

"I have done so," said Marat, while the attendants continued to bind the patient.

"You have prepared his soul?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"As one always does, by words. I spoke to his soul, his intelligence, his sensibility—to that organ which caused the Greek philosopher to exclaim, 'Pain, thou art no evil'—the language suitable for it. I said to him: 'You will not suffer.' That is the only remedy hitherto known, as regards the soul—falsehood! Why is this she-devil of a soul connected with the body? When I cut off this head just now, the body said nothing, yet the operation was a serious one. But motion had ceased, sensibility was extinguished, the soul had fled, as you spiritualists say. This is the reason why the head I severed said nothing, why the body which I mutilated allowed me to do so; while this body which is yet inhabited by a soul —for a short time indeed, but still inhabited—will cry out fearfully. Stop your ears well, master, you who are moved by this union of body and soul, which will always destroy your theory until you succeed in isolating the body from the soul."

"And you believe we shall never arrive at this isolation?"

"Try," said Marat, "this is an excellent opportunity."

"Well, yes, you are right," said Balsamo; "the opportunity is a good one, and I will make the attempt."

"Yes, try."

"I will."

"How so?"

"This young man interests me; he shall not suffer."

"You are an illustrious chief," said Marat, "but you are not the Almighty, and you cannot prevent this wretch from suffering."

"If he were not to feel the pain, do you think he would recover?"

"His recovery would be more probable, but not certain."

Balsamo cast an inexpressible look of triumph upon Marat, and placing himself before the young patient, whose frightened eyes, already dilated with the anguish of terror, met his:

"Sleep," said he, not alone with his lips, but with his look, with his will—with all the heat of his blood, all the vital energy of his body.

The head-surgeon was just commencing to feel the injured leg, and to point out the aggravated nature of the case to his students; but, at Balsamo's command, the young man, who had raised himself upon his seat, oscillated for a moment in the arms of his attendants, his head drooped, and his eyes closed.

"He is ill," said Marat.

"No, sir."

"But do you not see that he loses consciousness?"

"He is sleeping."

"What! he sleeps?"

"Yes."

Every one turned to look at the strange physician, whom they took for a madman. An incredulous smile hovered on Marat's lips.

"Is it usual for people to talk whilst in a swoon?" asked Balsamo.

"No."

"Well! question him—he will reply."

"Hallo! young man!" cried Marat.

"You need not speak so loud," said Balsamo; "speak in your usual voice."

"Tell us what is the matter with you."

"I was ordered to sleep, and I do sleep," replied the patient.

His voice was perfectly calm, and formed a strange contrast to that they had heard a few moments before.

All the attendants looked at each other.

"Now," said Balsamo, "release him."

"That is impossible," said the head-surgeon; "the slightest movement will spoil the operation."

"He will not stir."

"Who can assure me of that?"

"I, and he also—ask him."

"Can you be left untied, my friend?"

"Yes."

"And will you promise not to move?"

"I will promise it, if you command me."

"I command it."

"Faith! sir, you speak so positively that I am tempted to make the trial."

"Do so, sir; and fear nothing."

"Untie him."

The assistants obeyed.

Balsamo advanced to the bedside.

"From this moment," said he, "do not stir until I order you."

A carved statue upon a tombstone could not have been more motionless than the patient, upon this injunction.

"Now operate, sir," said Balsamo; "the patient is quite ready."

The surgeon took his bistoury; but, when upon the point of using it, he hesitated.

"Cut, sir! cut!" said Balsamo, with the air of an inspired prophet.

And the surgeon, yielding—like Marat, like the patient, like every one present—to the irresistible influence of Balsamo's words, raised the knife. The sound of the knife passing through the flesh was heard, but the patient never stirred, nor even uttered a sigh.

"From what country do you come, my friend?" asked Balsamo.

"I am a Breton, sir," replied the patient, smiling.

"And you love your country?"

"Oh! sir, it is so beautiful!"

In the meantime the surgeon was making the circular incisions in the flesh, by means of which, in amputations, the bone is laid bare.

"You quitted it when young?" asked Balsamo.

"At ten years of age, sir."

The incisions were made—the surgeon placed the saw on the bone.

"My friend," said Balsamo, "sing me that song which the salt-makers of Batz chant as they return to their homes after the day's work is over. I can only remember the first line:

"'My salt covered o'er with its mantle of foam.'"

The saw was now severing the bone; but at Balsamo's command the patient smiled, and commenced, in a low, melodious, ecstatic voice, like a lover or like a poet, the following verses:

"'My salt covered o'er with its mantle of foam,
The lake of pure azure that mirrors my home,
My stove where the peats ever cheerfully burn,
And the honeyed wheat-cake which awaits my return,—

"'The wife of my bosom—my silver-haired sire—
My urchins who sport round the clear evening fire—
And there, where the wild flowers, in brightest of bloom,
Their fragrance diffuse round my loved mother's tomb,—

"'Blest, blest be ye all!—Now the day's task is o'er,
And I stand once again at my own cottage door;
And richly will love my brief absence repay,
And the calm joys of eve the rude toils of the day.'"

The leg fell upon the bed while the patient was still singing.

CHAPTER CIV.

BODY AND SOUL.

EVERY one looked with astonishment at the patient—with admiration at the surgeon. Some said that both were mad. Marat communicated this opinion to Balsamo in a whisper.

"Terror has made the poor devil lose his senses," said he; "that is why he feels no pain."

"I think not," replied Balsamo; "and far from having lost his senses, I am sure that if I asked him he could tell us the day of his death, if he is to die, or the period of his convalescence, if he is to recover."

Marat was almost inclined to adopt the general opinion—that Balsamo was as mad as his patient. In the meantime, however, the surgeon was tying up the arteries, from which spouted streams of blood.

Balsamo drew a small phial from his pocket, poured a few drops of the liquid it contained upon a little ball of lint, and begged the chief surgeon to apply the lint to the arteries. The latter obeyed with a certain feeling of curiosity. He was one of the most celebrated practitioners of that period—a man truly enamoured of his profession, who repudiated none of its mysteries, and for whom chance was but the makeshift of doubt.

He applied the lint to the artery, which quivered, bubbled, and then only allowed the blood to escape drop by drop. He could now tie up the artery with the greatest facility.

This time Balsamo obtained an undoubted triumph, and all present asked him where he had studied, and of what school he was.

"I am a German physician of the school of Gottingen," replied he, "and I have made this discovery you have just witnessed. However, gentlemen and fellow practitioners, I wish this discovery to remain a secret for the present, as I have a wholesome terror of the stake, and the parliament of Paris might perhaps resume their functions once more for the pleasure of condemning a sorcerer."

The chief surgeon was still plunged in a reverie. Marat also seemed thoughtful, but he was the first to break the silence.

"You said just now," said he, "that if you were to question this man about the result of this operation he would reply truly, though the result is still veiled in futurity."

"I assert it again," replied Balsamo.

"Well, let us have the proof."

"What is this poor fellow's name?"

"Havard," replied Marat.

Balsamo turned to the patient, whose lips were yet murmuring the last words of the plaintive air.

"Well, my friend," asked he, "what do you augur from the state of this poor Havard?"

"What do I augur from his state?" replied the patient; "stay, I must return from Brittany, where I was, to the Hôtel Dieu, where he is."

"Just so; enter, look at him and tell me the truth respecting him."

"Oh! he is very ill; his leg has been cut off."

"Indeed?" said Balsamo. "And has the operation been successful?"

"Exceedingly so; but——"

The patient's face darkened.

"But what?" asked Balsamo.

"But," resumed the patient, "he has a terrible trial to pass through. The fever——"

"When will it commence?"

"At seven o'clock this evening."

All the spectators looked at each other.

"And this fever?" asked Balsamo.

"Oh! it will make him very ill; but he will recover from the first attack."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then, after this first attack, will he be saved?"

"Alas! no," said the wounded man, sighing.

"Will the fever return, then?"

"Oh, yes! and more severely than before. Poor Havard! poor Havard!" he continued, "he has a wife and several children." And his eyes filled with tears.

"Must his wife be a widow, then, and his children orphans?" asked Balsamo.

"Wait! wait!"

He clasped his hands.

"No, no," he exclaimed, his features lighting up with an expression of sublime faith; "no, his wife and children have prayed, and their prayers have found favour in the sight of God!"

"Then he will recover?"

"Yes."

"You hear, gentlemen," said Balsamo, "he will recover."

"Ask him in how many days," said Marat.

"In how many days, do you say?"

"Yes; you said he could indicate the phases, and the duration of his convalescence."

"I ask nothing better than to question him on the subject."

"Well, then, question him now."

"And when do you think Havard will recover?" said Balsamo.

"Oh! his cure will take a long time—a month, six weeks, two months. He entered this hospital five days ago, and he will leave it two months and fourteen days after having entered."

"And he will leave it cured?"

"Yes."

"But," said Marat, "unable to work, and consequently to maintain his wife and children."

Havard again clasped his hands.

"Oh! God is good; God will provide for him!"

"And how will God provide for him?" asked Marat. "As I am in the way of hearing something new to-day, I might as well hear that."

"God has sent to his bedside a charitable man who has taken pity upon him, and who has said to himself, 'Poor Havard shall not want.'"

The spectators were amazed; Balsamo smiled.

"Ha! this is in truth a strange scene," said the chief surgeon, at the same time taking the patient's hand, feeling his chest and forehead; "this man is dreaming."

"Do you think so?" said Balsamo.

Then, darting upon the sick man a look of authority and energy:

"Awake, Havard!" said he.

The young man opened his eyes with some difficulty, and gazed with profound surprise upon all these spectators, who had so soon laid aside their threatening character, and assumed an inoffensive one towards him.

"Well," said he sadly, "have you not operated yet? Are you going to make me suffer still more?"

Balsamo replied hastily. He feared the invalid's emotion. But there was no need for such haste; the surprise of all the spectators was so great that none would have anticipated him.

"My friend," said he, "be calm. The head-surgeon has operated upon

your leg in such a manner as to satisfy all the requirements of your position. It seems, my poor fellow, that you are not very strong-minded, for you fainted at the first incision."

"Oh! so much the better," said the Breton smilingly; "I felt nothing, and my sleep was even sweet and refreshing. What happiness—my leg will not be cut off!"

But just at that moment the poor man looked down, and saw the bed full of blood, and his amputated leg lying near him. He uttered a scream, and this time fainted in reality.

"Now question him," said Balsamo coldly to Marat; "you will see if he replies."

Then, taking the head-surgeon aside, while the nurses carried the poor young man back to his bed:

"Sir," said Balsamo, "you heard what your poor patient said?"

"Yes, sir, that he would recover."

"He said something else: he said that God would take pity upon him, and would send him wherewithal to support his wife and children."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, he told the truth on this point, as on the others. Only you must undertake to be the charitable medium of affording him this assistance. Here is a diamond, worth about twenty thousand livres; when the poor man is cured, sell it and give him the proceeds. In the meantime, since the soul, as your pupil M. Marat said very truly, has a great influence upon the body, tell Havard as soon as he is restored to consciousness that his future comfort and that of his children is secured."

"But, sir," said the surgeon, hesitating to take the ring which Balsamo offered him, "if he should not recover?"

"He will recover."

"Then allow me at least to give you a receipt."

"Sir!"

"That is the only condition upon which I can receive a jewel of such value."

"Do as you think right, sir."

"Your name, if you please?"

"The Count de Fenix."

The surgeon passed into the adjoining apartment, while Marat, overwhelmed, confounded, but still struggling against the evidence of his senses, approached Balsamo.

In five minutes the surgeon returned, holding in his hand the following receipt, which he gave Balsamo:

"I have received from the Count de Fenix a diamond, which he affirms to be worth twenty thousand livres, the price of which is to be given to the man Havard when he leaves the Hôtel Dieu.

"This 15th of September, 1771.

"GUILLOTIN, M.D."

Balsamo bowed to the doctor, took the receipt, and left the room, followed by Marat.

"You are forgetting your head," said Balsamo, for whom the wandering of the young student's thoughts was a great triumph.

"Ah! true," said he.

And he again picked up his dismal burden. When they emerged into the street, both walked forward very quickly without uttering a word;

then, having reached the Rue des Cordeliers, they ascended the steep stairs which led to the attic.

Marat, who had not forgotten the disappearance of his watch, stopped before the lodge of the portress, if the den which she inhabited deserved that name, and asked for Dame Grivette.

A thin, stunted, miserable-looking child, of about seven years old, replied in a whining voice:

"Mamma is gone out; she said that when you came nome I was to give you this letter."

"No, no, my little friend," said Marat; "tell her to bring it me herself."

"Yes, sir"

And Marat and Balsamo proceeded on their way.

"Ah!" said Marat, pointing out a chair to Balsamo, and falling upon a stool himself, "I see the master has some noble secrets."

"Perhaps I have penetrated farther than most men into the confidence of nature and into the works of God," replied Balsamo.

"Oh!" said Marat, "how science proves man's omnipotence, and makes us proud to be a man!"

"True; and a physician, you should have added."

"Therefore, I am proud of you, master," said Marat.

"And yet," replied Balsamo, smiling, "I am but a poor physician of souls."

"Oh! do not speak of that, sir—you, who stopped the patient's bleeding by material means."

"I thought my best cure was that of having prevented him from suffering. True, you assured me he was mad."

"He was so for a moment, certainly."

"What do you call madness? Is it not an abstraction of the soul?"

"Or of the mind,' said Marat.

"We will not discuss the point. The soul serves me as a term for what I mean. When the object is found, it matters little how you call it."

"There is where we differ, sir: you pretend you have found the thing and seek only the name; I maintain that you seek both the object and the name."

"We shall return to that immediately. You said, then, that madness was a temporary abstraction of the mind?"

"Certainly."

"Involuntary, is it not."

"Yes; I have seen a madman at Bicetre, who bit the iron bars of his cell, crying out all the time, 'Cook, your pheasants are very tender, but they are badly dressed.'"

"But you admit, at least, that this madness passes over the mind like a cloud, and that when it has passed, the mind resumes its former brightness?"

"That scarcely ever happens."

"Yet you saw our patient recover his senses perfectly after his insane dream."

"I saw it, but I did not understand what I saw. It is an exceptional case—one of those strange events which the Israelites called miracles."

"No, sir," said Balsamo; "it is simply the abstraction of the soul—the twofold isolation of spirit and matter. Matter—that inert thing—dust—which will return to dust; and soul, the divine spark which was enclosed for a short period in that dark lantern called the body, and which, being

the child of heaven, will return to heaven after the body has sunk to earth."

"Then you abstracted the soul momentarily from the body?"

"Yes, sir; I commanded it to quit the miserable abode which it occupied. I raised it from the abyss of suffering in which pain had bound it, and transported it into pure and heavenly regions. What, then, remained for the surgeon? The same that remained for your dissecting knife, when you severed that head you are carrying from the dead body—nothing but inert flesh, matter, clay."

"And in whose name did you command the soul?"

"In his name who created all the souls by his breath—the souls of the world, of men—in the name of God."

"Then," said Marat, "you deny free will?"

"I!" said Balsamo; "on the contrary, what am I doing at this moment? I show you, on the one hand, free will; on the other, abstraction. I show you a dying man a prey to excruciating pain; this man has a stoical soul, he anticipates the operation, he asks for it, he bears it, but he suffers. That is free will. But when I approach the dying man—I, the ambassador of God, the prophet, the apostle—and taking pity upon this man who is my fellow-creature, I abstract, by the powers which the Lord has given me, the soul from the suffering body, this blind, inert, insensible body becomes a spectacle which the soul contemplates with a pitying eye from the height of its celestial sphere. Did you not hear Havard, when speaking of himself, say, 'This poor Havard'? He did not say '*myself*.' It was because this soul had in truth no longer any connection with the body—it was already winging its way to heaven."

"But, by this way of reckoning, man is nothing," said Marat, "and I can no longer say to the tyrant, 'You have power over my body, but none over my soul.'"

"Ah! now you pass from truth to sophism; I have already told you, sir, it is your failing. God lends the soul to the body, it is true; but it is no less true that during the time the soul animates this body, there is a union between the two—an influence of one over the other—a supremacy of matter over mind, or mind over matter, according as, for some purpose hidden from us, God permits either the body or the soul to be the ruling power. But it is no less true that the soul which animates the beggar is as pure as that which reigns in the bosom of the king. That is the dogma which you, an apostle of equality, ought to preach. Prove the equality of the spiritual essences in these two cases, since you can establish it by the aid of all that is most sacred in the eyes of men, by holy books and traditions, by science and faith. Of what importance is the equality of matter? With physical equality you are only men; but spiritual equality makes you gods. Just now, this poor wounded man, this ignorant child of the people, told you things concerning his illness which none amongst the doctors would have ventured to pronounce. How was that? It was because his soul, temporarily freed from earthly ties, floated above this world, and saw from on high a mystery which our opaqueness of vision hides from us."

Marat turned his dead head back and forward upon the table, seeking a reply which he could not find. "Yes," muttered he, at last; "yes; there is something supernatural in all this."

"Perfectly natural, on the contrary, sir. Cease to call supernatural what has its origin in the functions and destiny of the soul. These functions are natural, although perhaps not known."

"But though unknown to us, master, these functions cannot surely be a mystery to you. The horse, unknown to the Peruvians, was yet perfectly familiar to the Spaniards, who had tamed him."

"It would be presumptuous in me to say 'I know.' I am more humble, sir; I say, 'I believe.'"

"Well! what do you believe?"

"I believe that the first, the most powerful, of all laws is the law of progress. I believe that God has created nothing without having a beneficent design in view; only, as the duration of this world is uncalculated and incalculable, the progress is slow. Our planet, according to the Scriptures, was sixty centuries old, when printing came like some vast lighthouse to illuminate the past and the future. With the advent of printing, obscurity and forgetfulness vanished. Printing is the memory of the world. Well! Gutenberg invented printing, and my confidence returned."

"Ah!" said Marat, ironically, "you will, perhaps, be able at last to read men's hearts."

"Why not?"

"Then you will open that little window in men's breasts which the ancients so much desired to see?"

"There is no need for that, sir. I shall separate the soul from the body; and the soul—the pure, immaculate daughter of God—will reveal to me all the turpitudes of the mortal covering it is condemned to animate."

"Can you reveal material secrets?"

"Why not!"

"Can you tell me, for instance, who has stolen my watch?"

"You lower science to a base level, sir. But, no matter. God's greatness is proved as much by a grain of sand as by the mountain—by the flesh-worm as by the elephant. Yes, I will tell you who has stolen your watch."

Just then a timid knock was heard at the door. It was Marat's servant who had returned, and who came, according to the young surgeon's order, to bring the letter.

CHAPTER CV.

MARAT'S PORTRESS.

THE door opened and Dame Grivette entered. This woman, whom we have not before taken the trouble to sketch, because she was one of those characters whom the painter keeps in the background, so long as he has no occasion for them—this woman now advances in the moving picture of this history, and demands her place in the immense picture we have undertaken to unroll before the eyes of our readers, in which, if our genius equalled our good-will, we would introduce all classes of men, from the beggar to the king, from Caliban to Ariel.

We shall now therefore attempt to delineate Dame Grivette, who steps forth out of the shade, and advances towards us.

She was a tall withered creature, of from thirty to five-and-thirty years of age, with dark sallow complexion, and blue eyes encircled with black rings

—the fearful type of that decline, that wasting-away, which is produced in densely-populated towns by poverty, bad air, and every sort of degradation, mental as well as bodily, amongst those creatures whom God created so beautiful, and who would otherwise have become magnificent in their perfect development, as all living denizens of earth, air, and sky are when man has not made their life one long punishment—when he has not tortured their limbs with chains and their stomachs with hunger, or with food almost as fatal.

Thus Marat's portress would have been a beautiful woman, if from her fifteenth year she had not dwelt in a den without air or light—if the fire of her natural instincts, fed by this oven-like heat, or by the icy cold, had not ceaselessly burned. She had long, thin hands, which the needle of the sempstress had furrowed with little cuts, which the suds of the wash-house had cracked and softened—which the burning coals of the kitchen had roasted and tanned—but in spite of all, hands which, by their form, the indelible trace of the divine mould, would have been called royal, if, instead of being blistered by the broom, they had wielded the sceptre. So true is it that this poor human body is only the outward sign of our profession.

But in this woman, the mind, which rose superior to the body, and which consequently had resisted external circumstances better, kept watch like a lamp; it illumined, as it were, the body by a reflected light, and at times a ray of beauty, youth, intelligence, and love was seen to glance from her dulled and stupid eyes—a ray of all the finest feelings of the human heart.

Balsamo gazed attentively at the woman, or rather at this singular nature, which had from the first struck his observing eye.

The portress entered holding the letter in her hand, and in a soft insinuating voice, like that of an old woman—for women condemned to poverty are old at thirty—said:

"M. Marat, here is the letter you asked for."

"It was not the letter I wanted," said Marat; "I wished to see you."

"Well! here I am at your service, Monsieur Marat" (Dame Grivette made a curtsey), "what do you want with me?"

"You know very well what I want. I wish to know something about my watch."

"Ah, dame! I can't tell what has become of it. I saw it all day yesterday hanging from the nail over the mantel-piece."

"You mistake: all day yesterday it was in my fob; but when I went out at six o'clock in the evening I put it under the candlestick, because I was going among a crowd, and I feared it might be stolen."

"If you put it under the candlestick, it must be there yet."

And with feigned simplicity, which she was far from suspecting to be so transparent, she raised the very candlestick, of the pair which ornamented the mantel-piece, under which Marat had concealed his watch.

"Yes, that is the candlestick, sure enough," said the young man; "but where is the watch?"

"No; I see it is no longer there. Perhaps you did not put it there, M. Marat."

"But when I tell you I did."

"Look for it carefully."

"Oh, I have looked carefully enough," said Marat, with an angry glance.

"Then you have lost it."

"But I tell you that yesterday I put it under that candlestick myself."

"Then some one must have entered," said Dame Grivette; "you see so many people, so many strangers."

"All an excuse!" cried Marat, more and more enraged. "You know very well that no one has been here since yesterday. No, no; my watch is gone where the silver top of my last cane went, where the little silver spoon you know of is gone to, and my knife with the six blades. I am robbed, Dame Grivette! I have borne much, but I shall not tolerate this: so take notice."

"But, sir," said Dame Grivette, "do you mean to accuse me?"

"You ought to take care of my effects."

"I have not even the key."

"You are the portress."

"You give me a crown a month, and you expect to be as well served as if you had ten domestics."

"I do not care about being badly served; but I do care whether I am robbed or not."

"Sir, I am an honest woman."

"Yes, an honest woman whom I shall give in charge to the police, if my watch is not found in an hour."

"To the police?"

"Yes."

"To the police—an honest woman like me?"

"An honest woman, do you say? Honest! that's good."

"Yes; and of whom nothing bad can be said! do you hear that?"

"Come, come! enough of this, Dame Grivette."

"Ah! I thought that you suspected me, when you went out."

"I have suspected you ever since the top of my cane disappeared."

"Well! M. Marat, I will tell you something, in my turn."

"What will you tell me?"

"While you were away I have consulted my neighbours."

"Your neighbours!—for what purpose?"

"Respecting your suspicions."

"I had said nothing of them to you at the time."

"But I saw them plainly."

"And the neighbours? I am curious to know what they said."

"They said that if you suspect me, and have even gone so far as to impart your suspicions to another person, you must pursue the affair to the end."

"Well!"

"That is to say, you must prove that the watch has been taken."

"It has been taken, since it was there and is now gone."

"Yes, but taken by me—taken by me; do you understand? Oh! justice requires proofs; your word will not be sufficient, M. Marat; you are no more than one of ourselves, M. Marat."

Balsamo, calm as ever, looked on during this scene. He saw that though Marat's conviction was not altered, he had, nevertheless, lowered his tone.

"Therefore," continued the portress, "if you do not render justice to my probity—if you do not make some reparation to my character—it is I who will send for the police, as our landlord just now advised me to do."

Marat bit his lips. He knew there was a real danger in this. The landlord was an old, rich, retired merchant. He lived on the third story; and the scandal-mongers of the quarter did not hesitate to assert that, some ten years before, he had not been indifferent to the charms of the portress, who was then kitchen-maid to his wife.

Now, Marat attended mysterious meetings. Marat was a young man of not very settled habits, besides being addicted to concealment and suspected by the police; and, for all these reasons, he was not anxious to have an affair with the commissary, seeing that it might tend to place him in the hands of M. de Sartines, who liked much to read the papers of young men such as Marat, and to send the authors of such noble writings to houses of meditation, such as Vincennes, the Bastille, Charenton, and Bicetre.

Marat, therefore, lowered his tone; but, in proportion as he did so, the portress raised hers. The result was that this nervous and hysterical woman raged like a flame which suddenly meets with a current of fresh air.

Oaths, cries, tears—she employed all in turn; it was a regular tempest.

Then Balsamo judged that the time had come for him to interfere. He advanced towards the woman, and looking at her with an ominous and fiery glance, he stretched two fingers towards her, uttering, not so much with his lips as with his eyes, his thought, his whole will, a word which Marat could not hear.

Immediately Dame Grivette became silent, tottered, and, losing her equilibrium, staggered backwards, her eyes fearfully dilated, and fell upon the bed without uttering a word.

After a short interval her eyes closed and opened again, but this time the pupil could not be seen; her tongue moved convulsively, but her body was perfectly motionless, and yet her hands trembled as if shaken by fever.

"Ha!" said Marat; "like the wounded man in the hospital!"

"Yes."

"Then she is asleep?"

"Silence!" said Balsamo.

Then, addressing Marat:

"Sir," said he, "the moment has now come when all your incredulity must cease. Pick up that letter which this woman was bringing you, and which she dropped when she fell."

Marat obeyed.

"Well?" he asked.

"Wait!"

And taking the letter from Marat's hands:

"You know from whom this letter comes?" asked Balsamo of the somnambulist.

"No, sir," she replied.

Balsamo held the sealed letter close to the woman. "Read it to M. Marat, who wishes to know the contents."

"She cannot read," said Marat.

"Yes, but you can read?"

"Of course."

"Well, read it, and she will read it after you in proportion as the words are engraven upon your mind."

Marat broke the seal of the letter and read it, while Dame Grivette standing, and trembling beneath the all-powerful will of Balsamo, repeated word for word, as Marat read them to himself, the following words:

"MY DEAR HIPPOCRATES,—

"Apelles has just finished his portrait; he has sold it for fifty

francs, and these fifty francs are to be eaten to-day at the tavern in the Rue Saint Jacques. Will you come?

"P.S.—It is understood that part is to be drunk.

"Your friend,

"L. DAVID."

It was word for word what was written.

Marat let the paper fall from his hand.

"Well," said Balsamo, "you see that Dame Grivette also has a soul, and that this soul wakes while she sleeps."

"And a strange soul," said Marat; "a soul which can read when the body cannot."

"Because the soul knows everything—because the soul can reproduce by reflection. Try to make her read this when she is awake—that is to say, when the body has wrapped the soul in its shadow—and you will see."

Marat was dumb; his whole material philosophy rebelled within him, but he could not find a reply.

"Now," continued Balsamo, "we shall pass on to what interests you most; that is to say, as to what has become of your watch. Dame Grivette," said he, turning to her, "who has taken M. Marat's watch?"

The somnambulist made a violent gesture of denial.

"I do not know," said she.

"You know perfectly well," persisted Balsamo, "and you shall tell me."

Then, with a more decided exertion of his will:

"Who has taken M. Marat's watch?—speak! Dame Grivette has not stolen M. Marat's watch. Why does M. Marat believe she has?"

"If it is not she who has taken it, tell me who has?"

"I do not know."

"You see," said Marat, "conscience is an impenetrable refuge."

"Well, since you have only this last doubt," said Balsamo, "you shall be convinced."

Then, turning again to the portress:

"Tell me who took the watch; I insist upon it."

"Come, come," said Marat, "do not ask an impossibility!"

"You heard?" said Balsamo; "I have said you must tell me."

Then, beneath the pressure of this imperious command, the unhappy woman began to ring her hands and arms as if she were mad; a shudder like that of an epileptic fit ran through her whole body; her mouth was distorted with a hideous expression of terror and weakness; she threw herself back, rigid as if she were in a painful convulsion, and fell upon the bed.

"No, no," said she; "I would rather die!"

"Well," said Balsamo, with a burst of anger which made the fire flash from his eyes, "you shall die if necessary, but you shall speak. Your silence and your obstinacy are sufficient indications for me; but for an incredulous person we must have irrefragable proofs. Speak!—I will it: who has taken the watch?"

The nervous excitement was at its height; all the strength and power of the somnambulist struggled against Balsamo's will; inarticulate cries escaped from her lips, which were stained with a reddish foam.

"She will fall into an epileptic fit," said Marat.

"Fear nothing; it is the demon of falsehood who is in her, and who refuses to come out."

Then, turning towards the woman, and throwing in her face as much fluid as his hands could contain :

"Speak," said he ; "who has taken the watch ?"

"Dame Grivette," replied the somnambulist, in an almost inaudible voice.

"When did she take it ?"

"Yesterday evening."

"Where was it ?"

"Underneath the candlestick."

"What has she done with it ?"

"She has taken it to the Rue Saint Jacques."

"Where in the Rue Saint Jacques ?"

"To No. 29."

"Which story ?"

"The fifth."

"To whom did she give it ?"

"To a shoemaker's apprentice."

"What is his name ?"

"Simon."

"What is this man to her ?"

The woman was silent.

"What is this man to her ?"

The somnambulist was again silent.

"What is this man to her ?" repeated Balsamo.

The same silence.

Balsamo extended towards her his hand, impregnated with the fluid, and the unfortunate woman, overwhelmed by this terrible attack, had only strength to murmur :

"Her lover."

Marat uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Silence !" said Balsamo ; "allow conscience to speak."

Then, continuing to address the woman, who was trembling all over, and bathed in prespiration :

"And who advised Dame Grivette to steal the watch ?" asked he.

"No one. She raised the candlestick by accident, she saw the watch, and the demon tempted her."

"Did she do it from want ?"

"No ; for she did not sell the watch."

"She gave it away, then ?"

"Yes."

"To Simon ?"

The somnambulist made a violent effort.

"To Simon," said she.

Then she covered her face with her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

Balsamo glanced at Marat, who, with gaping mouth, disordered hair, and dilated eyes, was gazing at the fearful spectacle.

"Well, sir !" said he ; "you see, at last, the struggle between the body and the soul. You see conscience forced to yield, even in a redoubt which it had believed impregnable. Do you confess now that God has forgotten nothing in this world, and that He is in everything. Then deny no longer that there is a conscience—deny no longer that there is a soul—deny no longer the unknown, young man ! Above all, do not deny faith, which is power supreme ; and since you are ambitious, M. Marat, study ; speak little, think much, and do not judge your superiors lightly. Adieu ; my

words have opened a vast field before you ; cultivate this field, which contains hidden treasures. Adieu ! Happy will you be if you can conquer the demon of incredulity which is in you, as I have conquered the demon of falsehood which was in this woman."

And with these words, which caused the blush of shame to tinge the young man's cheeks, he left the room.

Marat did not even think of taking leave of him. But after his first stupor was over, he perceived that Dame Grivette was still sleeping. This sleep struck terror to his soul. Marat would rather have seen a corpse upon his bed, even if M. de Sartines should interpret the fact after his own fashion.

He gazed on this lifeless form, these turned-up eyes, these palpitations, and he felt afraid. His fear increased when the living corpse rose, advanced towards him, took his hand, and said :

"Come with me, M. Marat."

"Where to ?"

"To the Rue St. Jacques."

"Why ?"

"Come, come ; he commands me to take you."

Marat, who had fallen upon a chair, rose.

Then Dame Grivette, still asleep, opened the door, and descended the stairs with the stealthy pace of a cat, scarcely touching the steps.

Marat followed, fearing every moment that she would fall, and in falling break her neck.

Having reached the foot of the stairs, she crossed the threshold, and entered the street, still followed by the young man whom she led in this manner to the house and the garret she had pointed out.

She knocked at the door ; Marat felt his heart beat so violently that he thought it must be audible.

A man was in the garret ; he opened the door. In this man Marat recognised a workman of from five-and-twenty to thirty years of age, whom he had several times seen in the porter's lodge.

Seeing Dame Grivette followed by Marat, he started back.

But the somnambulist walked straight to the bed, and putting her hand under the thin bolster, she drew out the watch, which she gave to Marat, whilst the shoemaker Simon, pale with terror, dared not utter a word, and watched with alarmed gaze the least movements of this woman, whom he believed to be mad.

Scarcely had her hand touched Marat's, in returning him the watch, than she gave a deep sigh and murmured :

"He awakes me ! He awakes me !"

Her nerves relaxed like a cable freed from the capstan, the vital spark again animated her eyes, and finding herself face to face with Marat, her hand in his, and still holding the watch—that is to say, the irrefragable proof of her crime—she fell upon the floor of the garret in a deep swoon.

"Does conscience really exist, then ?" asked Marat of himself, as he left the room, doubt in his heart and reverie in his eyes.

CHAPTER CVI.

THE MAN AND HIS WORKS.

WHILE Marat was employing his time so profitably in philosophising on conscience and a dual existence, another philosopher in the Rue Plâtrière was also busy in reconstructing, piece by piece, every part of the preceding evening's adventures, and asking himself if he were or were not a very wicked man. Rousseau, with his elbows leaning upon the table, and his head drooping heavily on his left shoulder, was deep in thought.

His philosophical and political works, "Emilius" and the "Social Contract," were lying open before him.

From time to time, when his reflections required it, he stooped down to turn over the leaves of these books, which he knew by heart.

"Ah! good heavens!" said he, reading a paragraph from "Emilius" upon liberty of conscience, "what incendiary expressions! What philosophy! Just heaven! was there ever in the world a firebrand like me?

"What!" added he, clasping his hands above his head, "have I written such violent outbursts against the throne—the altar of society? I can no longer be surprised if some dark and brooding minds have outstripped my sophisms, and have gone astray in the paths which I have strewed for them with all the flowers of rhetoric. I have acted as the disturber of society!"

He rose from his chair, and paced the room in great agitation.

"I have," continued he, "abused those men in power who exercise tyranny over authors. Fool! barbarian that I was! Those people are right—a thousand times right! What am I, if not a man dangerous to the state? My words, written to enlighten the masses—at least, such was the pretext I gave myself—have become a torch which will set the world on fire. I have sown discourses on the inequality of ranks, projects of universal fraternity, plans of education—and now I reap a harvest of passions so ferocious that they would overturn the whole framework of society, of intestine wars capable of depopulating the world, and of manners so barbarous that they would roll back the civilisation of ten centuries!—Oh! I am a great criminal!"

He read once more a page of his "Savoyard Vicar."

"Yes, that is it! *Let us unite to form plans for our happiness.*

"I have written it! *Let us give our virtues the force which others give to their vices.* I have written that also."

And Rousseau became still more agitated and unhappy than before.

"Thus, by my fault," said he, "brothers are united to brothers, and one day or other some of these concealed places of meeting will be invaded by the police; the whole nest of these men, who have sworn to eat one another in case of treachery, will be arrested, and one bolder than the others will take my book from his pocket and will say—'What do you complain of? We are disciples of M. Rousseau; we are going through a course of philosophy!' Oh! how Voltaire will laugh at that! There is no fear of that courtier's ever getting into such a wasp's nest!"

The idea that Voltaire would ridicule him put the Genevese philosopher into a violent rage.

"I a conspirator!" muttered he; "I must be in my dotage, certainly! Am I not, in truth, a famous conspirator?"

He was at this point when Therese entered with the breakfast, but he did not see her. She perceived that he was attentively reading a passage in the "Reveries of a Recluse."

"Very good," said she, placing the hot milk noisily upon the very book; "my peacock is looking at himself in the glass! Monsieur reads his books! M. Rousseau admires himself!"

"Come, Therese," said the philosopher, "patience—leave me; I am in no humour for laughing."

"Oh yes, it is magnificent! is it not?" said she, mockingly. "You are delighted with yourself. What vanity authors have!—and how angry they are to see it in us poor women!—If I only happen to look in my little mirror, monsieur grumbles and calls me a coquette."

She proceeded in this strain, making him the most unhappy man in the world, as if Rousseau had not been richly enough endowed by nature in this respect. He drank his milk without steeping his bread. He reflected.

"Very good," said she; "there you are, thinking again. You are going to write another book full of horrible things."

Rousseau shuddered.

"You dream," continued Therese, "of your ideal women, and you write books which young girls ought not to read, or else profane works which will be burnt by the hands of the common executioner."

The martyr shuddered again. Therese had touched him to the quick.

"No," replied he; "I will write nothing more which can cause an evil thought. On the contrary, I wish to write a book which all honest people will read with transports of joy."

"Oh! oh!" said Therese, taking away the cup; "that is impossible; your mind is full of obscene thoughts. Only the other day I heard you read some passage or other, and in it you spoke of women whom you adored. You are a satyr! a magus!"

This word "magus" was one of the most abusive in Therese's vocabulary; it always made Rousseau shudder.

"There, there now!" said he; "my dear woman, you will find that you shall be satisfied. I intend to write that I have found the means of regenerating the world without causing pain to a single individual by the changes which will be effected. Yes, yes; I will mature this project. No revolutions! Great heavens! my good Therese, no revolutions!"

"Well, we shall see," said the housekeeper.

"Stay! some one rings."

Therese went out and returned almost immediately with a handsome young man, whom she requested to wait in the outer apartment. Then, rejoining Rousseau, who was already taking notes with his pencil:

"Be quick," said she, "and lock all these infamous things fast. There is some one who wishes to see you."

"Who is it?"

"A nobleman of the court."

"Did he not tell you his name?"

"A good idea! as if I would receive a stranger!"

"Tell it me, then."

"M. de Coigny."

"M. de Coigny!" exclaimed Rousseau; "M. de Coigny, gentleman-in-waiting to the dauphin?"

"It must be the same; a charming youth, a most amiable young man."

"I will go, Therese."

Rousseau gave a glance at himself in the mirror, dusted his coat, wiped his slippers, which were only old shoes, trodden down in the heels by long wear, and entered the dining-room, where the gentleman was waiting.

The latter had not sat down. He was looking, with a sort of curiosity, at the dried plants pasted by Rousseau upon paper, and enclosed in frames of black wood. At the noise Rousseau made in entering, he turned, and bowing most courteously:

"Have I the honour," said he, "of speaking to M. Rousseau?"

"Yes, sir," replied the philosopher, in a morose voice, not unmingled however with a kind of admiration for the remarkable beauty and unaffected elegance of the person before him.

M. de Coigny was, in fact, one of the handsomest and most accomplished gentlemen in France. It must have been for him, and such as him, that the costume of that period was invented. It displayed to the greatest advantage the symmetry and beauty of his well-turned leg, his broad shoulders and deep chest; it gave a majestic air to his exquisitely-formed head, and added to the ivory whiteness of his aristocratic hands.

His examination satisfied Rousseau, who, like a true artist, admired all beautiful wherever he met with it.

"Sir," said he, "what can I do for you?"

"You have been perhaps informed, sir," replied the young nobleman, "that I am the Count de Coigny. I may add that I come from her royal highness the dauphiness."

Rousseau reddened and bowed. Therese, who was standing in a corner of the dining-room, with her hands in her pockets, gazed with complacent eyes at the handsome messenger of the greatest princess in France.

"Her royal highness wants me—for what purpose?" asked Rousseau. "But take a chair, if you please, sir."

Rousseau sat down, and M. de Coigny drew forward a straw-bottomed chair, and followed his example.

"Monsieur, here is the fact. The other day, when his majesty dined at Trianon, he expressed a good deal of admiration for your music, which is indeed charming. His majesty sang your prettiest airs, and the dauphiness, who is always anxious to please his majesty in every respect, thought that it might give him pleasure to see one of your comic operas performed in the theatre at Trianon."

Rousseau bowed low.

"I come, therefore, to ask you, from the dauphiness——"

"Oh, sir," interrupted Rousseau, "my permission has nothing to do in the matter. My pieces, and the airs belonging to them, are the property of the theatre where they are represented. The permission must therefore be sought from the comedians, and her royal highness will, I am assured, find no obstacles in that quarter. The actors will be too happy to play and sing before his majesty and the court."

"That is not precisely what I am commissioned to request, sir," said M. de Coigny. "Her royal highness the dauphiness wishes to give him a more complete and more recherché entertainment to his majesty. He knows all your operas, sir."

Another bow from Rousseau.

"And sings them charmingly."

Rousseau bit his lips.

"It is too much honour," stammered he.

"Now," pursued M. de Coigny, "as several ladies of the court are excellent musicians, and sing delightfully, and as several gentlemen also have studied music with some success, whichever of your operas the dauphiness may choose shall be performed by this company of ladies and gentlemen, the principal actors being their royal highnesses."

Rousseau bounded in his chair.

"I assure you, sir," said he, "that this is a signal honour conferred upon me, and I beg you will offer my most humble thanks to the dauphiness."

"Oh! that is not all," said M. de Coigny, with a smile.

"Ah!"

"The troupe thus composed is more illustrious, certainly, than that usually employed, but also more inexperienced. The superintendence and the advice of a master are therefore indispensable. The performance ought to be worthy of the august spectator who will occupy the royal box, and also of the illustrious author."

Rousseau rose to bow again. This time the compliment had touched him, and he saluted M. de Coigny most graciously.

"For this purpose, sir," continued the gentleman-in-waiting, "her royal highness requests your company at Trianon, to superintend the general rehearsal of the work."

"Oh!" said Rousseau, "her royal highness cannot surely think of such a thing. I at Trianon?"

"Well!" said M. de Coigny, with the most natural air possible.

"Oh! sir, you are a man of taste and judgment, you have more tact than the majority of men; answer me, on your conscience, is not the idea of Rousseau, the philosopher, the outlaw, the misanthrope, attending at court, enough to make the whole cabal split their sides with laughter?"

"I do not see," replied M. de Coigny, coldly, "how the laughter and the remarks of that foolish set which persecutes you should disturb the repose of a gallant man, and an author who may lay claim to be the first in the kingdom. If you have this weakness, M. Rousseau, conceal it carefully; it alone would be sufficient to raise a laugh at your expense. As to what remarks may be made, you will confess that those making them had better be careful on that point, when the pleasure and the wishes of her royal highness the dauphiness, presumptive heiress of the French kingdom, are in question."

"Certainly," said Rousseau; "certainly."

"Can it be, possibly, a lingering feeling of false shame?" said M. de Coigny, smiling. "Because you have been severe upon kings, do you fear to humanize yourself? Ah! Monsieur Rousseau, you have given valuable lessons to the human race, but I hope you do not hate them. And, besides, you certainly except the ladies of the blood-royal."

"Sir, you are very kind to press me so much; but think of my position—I live retired, alone, unhappy."

Therese made a grimace.

"Unhappy!" said she; "he is hard to please!"

"Whatever effort I may make, there will always be something in my features and manner unpleasing to the eyes of the king and the princesses, who seek only joy and happiness. What should I do there—what should I say?"

"One would think you distrusted yourself. But, sir, do you not think that he who has written the 'Nouvelle Héloïse' and the 'Confessions,'

must have more talent for speaking and acting than all of us others put together, no matter what position we occupy?"

"I assure you, sir, it is impossible."

"That word, sir, is not known to princes."

"And for that very reason, sir, I shall remain at home."

"Sir, you would not inflict the dreadful disappointment of returning vanquished and disgraced to Versailles on me, the venturous messenger who undertook to satisfy her royal highness? It would be such a blow to me, that I should immediately retire into voluntary exile. Come, my dear M. Rousseau, grant to me, a man full of the deepest sympathy for your works, this favour—a favour which you would refuse to supplicating kings."

"Sir, your kindness gains my heart; your eloquence is irresistible; and your voice touches me more than I can express."

"Will you allow yourself to be persuaded?"

"No, I cannot—no, decidedly; my health forbids such a journey."

"A journey! oh, Monsieur Rousseau, what are you thinking of? An hour and a quarter in a carriage!"

"Yes; for you and your prancing horses."

"But all the equipages of the court are at your disposal, M. Rousseau. The dauphiness charged me to tell you that there is an apartment prepared for you at Trianon; for she is unwilling that you should have to return so late to Paris. The dauphin, who knows all your works by heart, said, before the whole court, that he would be proud to show the room in his palace where M. Rousseau had slept."

Therese uttered a cry of admiration, not for Rousseau, but for the good prince.

Rousseau could not withstand this last mark of good-will.

"I must surrender," said he, "for never have I been so well attacked."

"Your heart only is vanquished, sir," replied De Coigny; "your mind is impregnable."

"I shall go, then, sir, in obedience to the wishes of her royal highness."

"Oh! sir, receive my personal thanks. As regards the dauphiness's, permit me to abstain. She would feel annoyed at being forestalled, as she means to pay them to you in person this evening. Besides, you know, it is the man's part to thank a young and adorable lady who is good enough to make advances to him."

"True, sir," replied Rousseau, smiling; "but old men have the privilege of pretty women—they are sought after."

"If you will name your hour, M. Rousseau, I shall send my carriage for you; or, rather, I will come myself to take you up."

"No, thank you, sir. I must positively refuse your kind offer. I will go to Trianon, but let me go in whatever manner I may choose. From this moment leave me to myself. I shall come, that is all. Tell me the hour."

"What, sir! you will not allow me to introduce you? I know I am not worthy of the honour, and that a name like yours needs no announcement——"

"Sir, I am aware that you are more at court than I am anywhere in the world. I do not refuse your offer, therefore, from any motives personal to yourself; but I love my liberty. I wish to go as if I were merely taking a walk, and—in short, that is my ultimatum."

"Sir, I bow to your decision, and should be most unwilling to displease you in any particular. The rehearsal commences at six o'clock."

"Very well. At a quarter before six I shall be at Trianon."

"But by what conveyance?"

"That is my affair; these are my horses."

He pointed to his legs, which were still well formed, and displayed with some pretension.

"Five leagues!" said M. de Coigny, alarmed, "you will be knocked up—take care, it will be a fatiguing evening!"

"In that case, I have my carriage and my horses also—a fraternal carriage—the popular vehicle—which belongs to my neighbour as well as to myself, and which costs only fifteen sous."

"Oh! good heavens! The stage-coach! You make me shudder."

"Its benches, which seem to you so hard, are to me like the Sybarite's couch. To me they seem stuffed with down or strewn with rose-leaves. Adieu, sir, till this evening."

M. de Coigny, seeing himself thus dismissed, took his leave after a multitude of thanks, indications more or less precise, and expressions of gratitude for his services. He descended the dark staircase, accompanied by Rousseau to the landing, and by Therese half way down the stairs.

M. de Coigny entered his carriage, which was waiting in the street, and drove back to Versailles, smiling to himself.

Therese returned to the apartment, slamming the door with angry violence, which foretold a storm for Rousseau.

CHAPTER CVII.

ROUSSEAU'S TOILET

WHEN M. de Coigny was gone, Rousseau, whose ideas this visit had entirely changed, threw himself into a little armchair, with a deep sigh, and said in a sleepy tone:

"Oh! how tiresome this is! How these people weary me with their persecutions!"

Therese caught the last words as she entered, and placing herself before Rousseau:

"How proud we are!" said she.

"I?" asked Rousseau, surprised.

"Yes; you are a vain fellow—a hypocrite!"

"I?"

"Yes, you! you are enchanted to go to court, and you conceal your joy under this false indifference."

"Oh! good heavens!" replied Rousseau, shrugging his shoulders, and humiliated at being so truly described.

"Do you not wish to make me believe that it is not a great honour for you to perform for the king the airs you thump here upon your spinet, like a good-for-nothing as you are?"

Rousseau looked angrily at his wife.

"You are a simpleton," said he; "it is no honour for a man such as I am to appear before a king. To what does this man owe that he is on the throne? To a caprice of nature, which gave him a queen as his mother; but I am worthy of being called before the king to minister to his recrea-

tion. It is to my works I owe it, and to the fame acquired by my works."

Therese was not a woman to be so easily conquered.

"I wish M. de Sartines heard you talking in this style; he would give you a lodging in Bicetre, or a cell at Charenton."

"Because this M. de Sartines is a tyrant in the pay of another tyrant, and because man is defenceless against tyrants with the aid of his genius alone. But if M. de Sartines were to persecute me——"

"Well, what then?" asked Therese.

"Ah! yes," sighed Rousseau, "yes, I know that would delight my enemies."

"Why have you enemies?" continued Therese. "Because you are ill-natured, and because you have attacked every one. Ah, M. de Voltaire knows how to make friends, he does!"

"True," said Rousseau, with an angelic smile.

"But, dame! M. de Voltaire is a gentleman—he is the intimate friend of the King of Prussia—he has horses, he is rich, and lives in his château at Ferney. And all that he owes to his merit. Therefore, when he goes to court, he does not act the disdainful man—he is quite at home there."

"And do you think," said Rousseau, "that I shall not be at home there? Think you that I do not know where all the money that is spent there comes from, or that I am duped by the respect which is paid to the master? Oh! my good woman, who judgest everything falsely, remember, if I act the disdainful, it is because I really feel contempt—remember that if I despise the pomp of these courtiers, it is because they have stolen their riches."

"Stolen!" said Therese, with inexpressible indignation.

"Yes, stolen, from you—from me—from every one. All the gold they have upon their fine clothes should be restored to the poor wretches who want bread. That is the reason why I, who know all these things, go so reluctantly to court."

"I do not say that the people are happy—but the king is always the king."

"Well, I obey him; what more does he want?"

"Ah! you obey because you are afraid. You must not say in my hearing that you go against your will, or that you are a brave man, for if so, I shall reply that you are a hypocrite, and that you are very glad to go."

"I do not fear anything," said Rousseau, superbly.

"Good! Just go and say to the king one quarter of what you have been telling me the last half hour."

"I shall assuredly do so, if my feelings prompt me."

"You?"

"Yes. Have I ever recoiled?"

"Bah! You dare not take a bone from a cat when she is gnawing it, for fear she should scratch you! What would you be if surrounded by guards and swordsmen? Look you, I know you as well as if I were your mother. You will just now go and shave yourself afresh, oil your hair, and make yourself beautiful; you will display your leg to the utmost advantage; you will put on your interesting little winking expression, because your eyes are small and round, and if you opened them naturally, that would be seen, while, when you wink, you make people believe that they are as large as carriage entrances. You will ask me for your silk

stockings, you will put on your chocolate-coloured coat with steel buttons and your beautiful new wig; you will order a coach, and my philosopher will go and be adored by the ladies! And to-morrow—ah!—to-morrow, there will be such ecstatic reveries, such interesting languor! You will come back amorous, you will sigh and write verses, and you will dilute your coffee with your tears. Oh! how well I know you!"

"You are wrong, my dear," said Rousseau. "I tell you I am reluctantly obliged to go to court. I go because, after all, I fear to cause scandal, as every honest citizen should do. Moreover, I am not one of those who refuse to acknowledge the supremacy of one citizen in a republic; but as to making advances, as to brushing my new coat against the gold spangles of these gentlemen of the Œil-de-Bœuf—no, no—I shall do nothing of the sort, and if you catch me doing so, laugh at me as much as you please."

"Then you will not dress?" said Therese, sarcastically.

"No."

"You will not put on your new wig?"

"No."

"You will not wink with your little eyes?"

"I tell you I shall go like a free man, without affectation and without fear. I shall go to court as if I were going to the theatre, and let the actors like me or not, I care not for them."

"Oh! you will at least trim your beard," said Therese; "it is half a foot long!"

"I tell you I shall make no change."

Therese burst into so loud and prolonged a laugh that Rousseau was obliged to take refuge in the next room. But the housekeeper had not finished her persecutions; she had them of all colours and kinds.

She opened the cupboard and took out his best coat, his clean linen, and beautifully polished shoes. She spread all these articles out upon the bed and over the chairs in the apartment; but Rousseau did not seem to pay the least attention.

At last Therese said:

"Come, it is time you should dress. A court toilet is tedious. You will have barely time to reach Versailles at the appointed hour."

"I have told you, Therese, that I shall do very well as I am. It is the same dress in which I present myself every day amongst my fellow-citizens. A king is but a citizen like myself."

"Come, come!" said Therese, trying to tempt him and bring him to her purpose by artful insinuation; "do not pout, Jacques, and don't be foolish. Here are your clothes. Your razor is ready; I have sent for the barber, in case you have your nervousness to-day."

"Thank you, my dear," replied Rousseau; "I shall only just give myself a brush, and take my shoes because I cannot go out in slippers."

"Is he going to be firm, I wonder?" thought Therese.

She tried to coax him, sometimes by coquetry, sometimes by persuasion, and sometimes by the violence of her raillery. But Rousseau knew her, and saw the snare. He felt that the moment he should give way, he would be unmercifully disgraced and ridiculed by his better-half. He determined, therefore, not to give way, and abstained from looking at the fine clothes, which set off what he termed his natural advantages.

Therese watched him. She had only one resource left; this was the glance which Rousseau never failed to give in the glass before he went out; for the philosopher was neat to an extreme, if there can be an extreme in neatness.

But Rousseau continued to be on his guard, and as he had caught Therese's anxious look, he turned his back to the looking-glass. The hour arrived; the philosopher had filled his head with all the disagreeable remarks he could think of to say to the king.

He repeated some scraps of them to himself while he buckled his shoes, then tucked his hat under his arm, seized his cane, and taking advantage of a moment when Therese could not see him, he pulled down his coat and his waistcoat with both hands, to smooth the creases.

Therese now returned, handed him a handkerchief, which he plunged into his huge pocket, and then accompanied him to the landing-place, saying:

"Come, Jacques, be reasonable; you look quite frightful; you have the air of some false moneyer."

"Adieu!" said Rousseau.

"You look like a thief, sir," said Therese; "take care!"

"Take care of fire," said Rousseau, "and do not touch my papers."

"You have just the air of a spy, I assure you!" said Therese in despair.

Rousseau made no reply; he descended the steps singing, and favoured by the obscurity, he gave his hat a brush with his sleeve, smoothed his shirt-frill with his left hand, and touched up his toilet with a rapid but skilful movement.

Arrived at the foot of the stairs, he boldly confronted the mud of the Rue Plâtrière, walking upon tiptoe, and reached the Champs-Elysées, where those honest vehicles which some rather affectedly call *pataches* were stationed, and which, so late as ten years ago, still carried, or rather bundled, from Paris to Versailles those travellers who were obliged to use economy.

CHAPTER CVIII.

THE SIDE SCENES OF TRIANON.

THE adventures of the journey are of no importance. A Swiss, an assistant-clerk, a citizen, and an abbé, were of course amongst his travelling companions.

He arrived at half-past five. The court was already assembled at Trianon, and the performers were going over their parts while waiting for the king; for as to the author, no one thought of him. Some were aware that M. Rousseau of Geneva was to come to direct the rehearsal; but they took no greater interest in seeing M. Rousseau than M. Rameau, M. Marmontel, or any other of those singular animals, to a sight of which the courtiers sometimes treated themselves in their drawing-rooms or country-houses.

Rousseau was received by the usher-in-waiting, who had been ordered by M. de Coigny to inform him as soon as the philosopher should arrive.

This young nobleman hastened with his usual courtesy, and received Rousseau with the most amiable *empressement*. But scarcely had he cast his eyes over his person, than he stared with astonishment, and could not prevent himself from recommencing the examination.

Rousseau was dusty, pale, and dishevelled, and his paleness rendered conspicuous such a beard as no master of the ceremonies had ever seen reflected in the mirrors of Versailles.

Rousseau felt deeply embarrassed under M. de Coigny's scrutiny, but more embarrassed still when, approaching the hall of the theatre, he saw the profusion of splendid dresses, valuable lace, diamonds, and blue ribbons, which, with the gilding of the hall, produced the effect of a bouquet of flowers in an immense basket.

Rousseau felt ill at ease also when he breathed this perfumed atmosphere, so intoxicating for plebeian nerves. Yet he was obliged to proceed and put a bold face on the matter. Multitudes of eyes were fixed upon him who thus formed a stain, as it were, on the polish of the assembly. M. de Coigny, still preceding him, led him to the orchestra, where the musicians were awaiting him.

When there, he felt rather relieved, and while his music was being performed, he seriously reflected that the worst danger was past, that the step was taken, and that all the reasoning in the world could now be of no avail.

Already the dauphiness was on the stage, in her costume as Colette; she waited for Colin.

M. de Coigny was changing his dress in his box.

All at once the king entered, surrounded by a crowd of bending heads. Louis smiled, and seemed to be in the best humour possible.

The dauphin seated himself at his right hand, and the Count de Provence, arriving soon after, took his place on the left. On a sign from the king, the fifty persons who composed the assembly, private as it was, took their seats.

"Well, why do you not begin?" asked Louis.

"Sire," said the dauphiness, "the shepherds and shepherdesses are not yet dressed; we are waiting for them."

"They can perform in their evening-dresses," said the king.

"No, sire," replied the dauphiness, "for we wish to try the dresses and costumes by candle-light, to be certain of the effect."

"You are right, madame," said the king; "then let us take a stroll."

And Louis rose to make the circuit of the corridor and the stage. Besides, he was rather uneasy at not seeing Madame Dubarry.

When the king had left the box, Rousseau gazed in a melancholy mood and with an aching heart at the empty hall and his own solitary position; it was a singular contrast to the reception he had anticipated.

He had pictured to himself that on his entrance all the groups would separate before him; that the curiosity of the courtiers would be even more importunate and more significative than that of the Parisians; he had feared questions and presentations; and, lo! no one paid any attention to him!

He thought that his long beard was not yet long enough, that rags would not have been more remarked than his old clothes, and he applauded himself for not having been so ridiculous as to aim at elegance. But in the bottom of his heart he felt humiliated at being thus reduced to the simple post of leader of the orchestra. Suddenly an officer approached and asked him if he was not M. Rousseau?

"Yes, sir," replied he.

"Her royal highness the dauphiness wishes to speak to you, sir," said the officer.

Rousseau rose, much agitated.

The dauphiness was waiting for him. She held in her hand the air of Colette :

"My happiness is gone."

The moment she saw Rousseau, she advanced towards him. The philosopher bowed very humbly, saying to himself, "that his bow was for the woman, not for the princess."

The dauphiness, on the contrary, was as gracious towards the savage philosopher as she would have been to the most finished gentleman in Europe.

She requested his advice about the inflection she ought to give to the third strophe—

"Colin leaves me."

Rousseau forthwith commenced to develop a theory of declamation and melody, which, learned as it was, was interrupted by the noisy arrival of the king and several courtiers.

Louis entered the room in which the dauphiness was taking her lesson from the philosopher. The first impulse of the king's, when he saw this carelessly-dressed person, was the same that M. de Coigny had manifested, only M. de Coigny knew Rousseau, and the king did not.

He stared, therefore, long and steadily, at our freeman, whilst still receiving the thanks and compliments of the dauphiness.

This look, stamped with royal authority—this look, not accustomed to be lowered before any one—produced a powerful effect upon Rousseau, whose quick eye was timid and unsteady.

The dauphiness waited until the king had finished his scrutiny, then, advancing towards Rousseau, she said :

"Will your majesty allow me to present our author to you?"

"Your author?" said the king, seeming to consult memory.

During this short dialogue Rousseau was upon burning coals. The king's eye had successively rested upon and burnt up—like the sun's rays under a powerful lens, the long beard, the dubious shirt-frill, the dusty garb, and the old wig of the greatest writer in his kingdom.

The dauphiness took pity on the latter.

"M. Jean Jacques Rousseau, sire," said she, "the author of the charming opera we are going to execute before your majesty."

The king raised his head.

"Ah!" said he, coldly, "M. Rousseau, I greet you."

And he continued to look at him in such a manner as to point out all the imperfections of his dress.

Rousseau asked himself how he ought to salute the King of France, without being a courtier, but also without impoliteness, for he confessed that he was in the prince's house.

But while he was making these reflections, the king addressed him with that graceful ease of princes who have said everything when they have uttered an agreeable or a disagreeable remark to the person before them. Rousseau, petrified, had at first stood speechless. All the phrases he had prepared for the tyrant were forgotten.

"Monsieur Rousseau," said the king, still looking at his coat and wig, "you have composed some charming music, which has caused me to pass several very pleasant moments."

Then the king, in a voice which was diametrically opposed to all diapason and melody, commenced singing :

"Had I turned a willing ear,
The gallants of the town to hear,
Ah! I had found with ease
Other lovers then to please."

"It is charming!" said the king, when he had finished.

Rousseau bowed.

"I do not know if I shall sing it well," said the dauphiness.

Rousseau turned towards the dauphiness to make some remark in reply; but the king had commenced again, and was singing the romance of Colin:

"From my hut, obscure and cold,
Care is absent never;
Whether storm, or sun, or cold,
Suffering, toil, for ever."

His majesty sang frightfully for a musician. Rousseau, half flattered by the monarch's good memory, half-wounded by his detestable execution, looked like a monkey nibbling an onion—crying on one side of his face and laughing on the other.

The dauphiness preserved her composure with that imperturbable self-possession which is only found at court.

The king, without the least embarrassment, continued:

"If thou'lt come to cast thy lot
In thy Colin's humble cot,
My sweet shepherdess Colette,
I'd bid adieu to all regret."

Rousseau felt the colour rising to his face.

"Tell me, M. Rousseau," said the king, "is it true that you sometimes dress in the costume of an Armenian?"

Rousseau blushed more deeply than before, and his tongue was so glued to his throat that not for a kingdom could he have pronounced a word at this moment.

The king continued to sing, without waiting for a reply:

"Ah! but little, as times go,
Doth love know
What he'd let, or what he'd hinder."

"You live in the Rue Plâtrière, I believe, M. Rousseau?" said the king.

Rousseau made a gesture in the affirmative with his head, but that was the *ultima thule* of his strength. Never had he called up so much to his support. The king hummed:

"She is a child,
She is a child."

"It is said you are on bad terms with Voltaire, M. Rousseau?"

At this blow Rousseau lost the little presence of mind he had remaining, and was totally put out of countenance. The king did not seem to have much pity for him, and, continuing his ferocious melomania, he moved off, singing:

"Come, dance with me beneath the elms;
Young maidens, come, be merry."

with orchestral accompaniments which would have killed Apollo, as the latter killed Marsyas.

Rousseau remained alone in the centre of the room. The dauphiness had quitted it to finish her toilet.

Rousseau, trembling and confused, regained the corridor; but on his way he stumbled against a couple dazzling with diamonds, flowers, and lace, who filled up the entire width of the corridor, although the young man squeezed his lovely companion tenderly to his side.

The young woman, with her fluttering laces, her towering head-dress, her fan, and her perfumes, was radiant as a star. It was she against whom Rousseau brushed in passing.

The young man, slender, elegant, and charming, with his blue ribbon rustling against his English shirt-frill, every now and then burst into a laugh of most engaging frankness, and then suddenly interrupted it with little confidential whispers, which made the lady laugh in her turn, and showed that they were on excellent terms.

Rousseau recognised the Countess Dubarry in this beautiful lady, this seducing creature; and the moment he perceived her, true to his habit of absorbing his whole thoughts on a single object, he no longer saw her companion.

The young man with the blue ribbon was no other than the Count d'Artois, who was merrily toying with his grandfather's favourite.

When Madame Dubarry perceived Rousseau's dark figure, she exclaimed:

"Ah, good heavens!"

"What!" said the Count d'Artois, also looking at the philosopher; and already he had stretched out his hand to make way for his companion.

"M. Rousseau!" exclaimed Madame Dubarry.

"Rousseau of Geneva?" said the Count d'Artois, in the tone of a school-boy in the holidays.

"Yes, my lord," replied the countess.

"Ah! good-day, M. Rousseau," said the young fop, seeing Rousseau making a despairing effort to force a passage—"good-day; we are going to hear your music."

"My lord!"—stammered Rousseau, seeing the blue ribbon.

"Ah! most charming music!" exclaimed the countess; "and completely in harmony with the heart and mind of the author."

Rousseau raised his head, and his eyes met the burning gaze of the countess.

"Madame!" said he, ill-humouredly.

"I will play Colin, madame," cried the Count d'Artois, "and I entreat that you, Madame la Comtesse, will play Colette."

"With all my heart, my lord; but I would never dare—I, who am not an artist—to profane the music of a master."

Rousseau would have given his life to look again at her; but the voice, the tone, the flattery, the beauty, had each planted a baited hook in his heart. He tried to escape.

"Monsieur Rousseau," said the prince, blocking up the passage, "I wish you would teach me the part of Colin."

"I dare not ask Monsieur Rousseau to give me his advice respecting Colette," said the countess, feigning timidity, and thus completing the overthrow of the philosopher.

But yet his eyes inquired why.

"Monsieur Rousseau hates me," said she to the prince, with her enchanting voice.

"You are jesting!" exclaimed the Count d'Artois. "Who could hate you, madame?"

"You see it plainly," replied she.

"M. Rousseau is too great a man, and has written too many noble works, to fly from such a charming woman," said the Count d'Artois.

Rousseau heaved a sigh as if he were ready to give up the ghost, and made his escape through a narrow loophole which the Count d'Artois had imprudently left between himself and the wall. But Rousseau was not in luck this evening. He had scarcely proceeded four steps when he met another group, composed of two men, one old, the other young. The young one wore the blue ribbon; the other, who might be about fifty years of age, was dressed in red, and looked austere and pale. These two men overheard the merry laugh of the Count d'Artois, who exclaimed loudly:

"Ah! Monsieur Rousseau, Monsieur Rousseau! I shall say that the countess put you to flight; and, in truth, no one would believe it."

"Rousseau!" murmured the two men.

"Stop him, brother!" said the prince, still laughing; "stop him, M. de Vauguyon!"

Rousseau now comprehended on what rock his evil star had shipwrecked him. The Count de Provence and the governor of the royal youths were before him.

The Count de Provence also barred the way.

"Good day, sir," said he, with his dry pedantic voice.

Rousseau, almost at his wits' end, bowed, muttering to himself:

"I shall never get away!"

"Ah! I am delighted to have met you," said the prince, with the air of a schoolmaster who finds a pupil in fault.

"More absurd compliments!" thought Rousseau. "How insipid these great people are!"

"I have read your translation of Tacitus, sir."

"Ah! true," thought Rousseau; "this one is a pedant, a scholar."

"Do you know that it is very difficult to translate Tacitus?"

"My lord, I said so in a short preface."

"Yes, I know, I know; you said in it that you had only a slight knowledge of Latin."

"It is true, my lord."

"Then, M. Rousseau, why translate Tacitus?"

"My lord, it improves one's style."

"Ah! M. Rousseau, it was wrong to translate 'imperatoriâ brevitate' by *a grave and concise discourse*."

Rousseau, uneasy, consulted his memory.

"Yes," said the young prince, with the confidence of an old savant who discovers a fault in Saumaise; "yes, you translated it so. It is in the paragraph where Tacitus relates that Pison harangued his soldiers."

"Well, my lord?"

"Well, M. Rousseau, 'imperatoriâ brevitate' means, *with the conciseness of a general*, or of a man accustomed to command. *With the brevity of command;* that is the expression, is it not, Monsieur de la Vauguyon?"

"Yes, my lord," replied the governor.

Rousseau made no reply. The prince added:

"That is an evident mistake, Monsieur Rousseau. Oh! I will find you another."

Rousseau turned pale.

"Stay, Monsieur Rousseau, there is one in the paragraph relating to Cecina. It commences thus: 'At in superiore Germaniâ.' You know he is describing Cecina, and Tacitus says, 'Cito sermone.'"

"I remember it perfectly, my lord."

"You translated that by *speaking well.*"

"Yes, my lord, and I thought——"

"'Cito sermone' means *speaking quickly*, that is to say *easily.*"

"I said *speaking well.*"

"Then it should have been 'decoro,' or 'ornato,' or 'eleganti sermone.' 'cito' is a picturesque epithet, Monsieur Rousseau. Just as, in portraying the change in Otho's conduct, Tacitus says—'Delatâ voluptate, dissimulatâ luxuriâ, cuncta que ad imperii decorem composita.'"

"I have translated that—*Dismissing luxury and effeminacy to other times, he surprised the world by industriously applying himself to re-establish the glory of the empire.*"

"Wrong, M. Rousseau, wrong! In the first place, you have run three little phrases into one, which obliges you to translate 'dissimulatâ luxuriâ' badly. Then you made a blunder in the last portion of the phrase. Tacitus did not mean that the Emperor Otho applied himself to re-establishing the glory of the empire: he meant to say that, no longer gratifying his passions, and dissimulating his luxurious habits, Otho accommodated all, made all turn—all, you understand, M. Rousseau—that is to say, even his passions and his vices—to the glory of the empire. That is the sense—it is rather complex; yours, however, is too restricted, is it not, Monsieur de la Vauguyon?"

"Yes, my lord."

Rousseau perspired and panted under this pitiless infliction.

The prince allowed him a moment's breathing-time, and then continued:

"You are much more in your element in philosophy, sir."

Rousseau bowed.

"But your 'Emilius' is a dangerous book."

"Dangerous, my lord?"

"Yes, from the quantity of false ideas it will put into the small citizens' heads!"

"My lord, as soon as a man is a father, he can enter into the spirit of my book, whether he be the first or the last in the kingdom. To be a father—is—is——"

"Tell me, Monsieur Rousseau," asked the satirical prince, all at once, "your 'Confessions' form a very amusing book. How many children have you had?"

Rousseau turned pale, staggered, and raised an angry and stupefied glance to his young tormentor's face, the expression of which only increased the malicious humour of the Count de Provence.

It was only malice, for, without waiting for a reply, the prince moved away arm-in-arm with his preceptor, continuing his commentaries on the works of the man whom he had so cruelly crushed.

Rousseau, left alone, was gradually recovering from his stupefaction when he heard the first bars of his overture executed by the orchestra.

He proceeded in that direction with a faltering step, and when he had reached his seat, he said to himself:

"Fool! coward! stupid ass that I am! Now only do I find the answer I should have made the cruel little pedant. 'My lord,' I should have said, 'it is not charitable in a young person to torment a poor man!'"

He had just reached this point, quite content with his phrase, when the dauphiness and M. de Coigny commenced their duet. The pre-occupation

of the philosopher was disturbed by the suffering of the musician—the ear was to be tortured after the heart.

CHAPTER CIX.

THE REHEARSAL.

THE rehearsal once fairly commenced, and the general attention drawn to the stage, Rousseau was no longer remarked, and it was he, on the contrary, who became the observer. He heard court lords who sang completely out of tune in their shepherd's dresses, and saw ladies arrayed in their court dresses coquetting like shepherdesses.

The dauphiness sang correctly, but she was a bad actress; and her voice, moreover, was so weak that she could scarcely be heard. The king, not to intimidate any one, had retired to an obscure box, where he chatted with the ladies. The dauphin prompted the words of the opera, which went off royally badly.

Rousseau determined not to listen, but he felt it very difficult to avoid overhearing what passed. He had one consolation, however, for he had just perceived a charming face among the illustrious figurantes, and the village maiden who was the possessor of this charming face had incomparably the most delightful voice of the entire company.

Rousseau's attention became at once completely riveted, and from his position behind his desk, he gazed with his whole soul at the charming figurante, and listened with all his ears to drink in the enchanting melody of her voice.

When the dauphiness saw the author so deeply attentive, she felt persuaded, from his smile and his sentimental air, that he was pleased with the execution of his work, and, eager for a compliment—for she was a woman—she leaned forward to the desk, saying—

"Is our performance very bad, Monsieur Rousseau?"

But Rousseau, with lips apart and absent air, did not reply.

"Oh! we have made some blunders," said the dauphiness, "and M. Rousseau dares not tell us! Pray do, Monsieur Rousseau!"

Rousseau's gaze never left the beautiful personage, who on her side did not perceive in the least the attention which she excited.

"Ah!" said the dauphiness, following the direction of our philosopher's eyes, "it is Mademoiselle Taverney who has been in fault!"

Andrée blushed; she saw all eyes directed towards her.

"No! no!" exclaimed Rousseau; "it was not mademoiselle, for mademoiselle sings like an angel!"

Madame Dubarry darted at the philosopher a look keener than a javelin.

The Baron de Taverney, on the contrary, felt his heart bound with joy, and greeted Rousseau with a most enchanting smile.

"Do you think that young girl sings well?" said Madame Dubarry to the king, who was evidently struck by Rousseau's words.

"In a chorus I cannot hear distinctly," said Louis XV.; "it requires a musician to be able to distinguish."

Meanwhile Rousseau was busy in the orchestra directing the chorus:

"Colin revient à sa bergère,
Celebrons un retour si beau."

As he turned to resume his seat, he saw M. de Jussieu bowing to him graciously.

It was no slight pleasure for the Genevese to be seen thus giving laws to the court by a courtier who had wounded him a little by his superiority. He returned his bow most ceremoniously, and continued to gaze at Andrée, who looked even more lovely for the praises she had received.

As the rehearsal proceeded, Madame Dubarry became furious; twice had she surprised Louis XV.'s attention wandering, distracted by the spectacle before him from the sweet speeches she whispered.

The spectacle in the eyes of the jealous favourite meant Andrée alone, but this did not prevent the dauphiness from receiving many compliments and being in charmingly gay spirits. M. de Richelieu fluttered around her with the agility of a young man, and succeeded in forming, at the extremity of the stage, a circle of laughers, of which the dauphiness was the centre, and which rendered the Dubarry party extremely uneasy.

"It appears," said he aloud, "that Mademoiselle de Taverney has a sweet voice."

"Charming!" said the dauphiness; "and had I not been too selfish, I should have allowed her to play Colette; but as it is for my amusement that I undertook the character, I will give it up to no one."

"Oh! Mademoiselle de Taverney would not sing it better than your royal highness," said Richelieu, "and——"

"Mademoiselle is an excellent musician," said Rousseau, with enthusiasm.

"Excellent!" responded the dauphiness; "and, to confess the truth, it is she who teaches me my part; besides, she dances enchantingly, and I dance very badly."

The effect of this conversation upon the king, upon Madame Dubarry, and the whole crowd of curious newsmongers and envious intriguers, may be imagined. All either tasted the pleasure of inflicting a wound, or received the blow with shame and grief. There were no indifferent spectators, except perhaps Andrée herself.

The dauphiness, incited by Richelieu, ended by making Andrée sing the air:

"I have lost my love—
Colin leaves me."

The king's head was seen to mark the time with such evident tokens of pleasure, that Madame Dubarry's rouge fell off, from her agitation, in little flakes, as paintings fall to pieces from damp.

Richelieu, more malicious than a woman, enjoyed his revenge. He had drawn near the elder Taverney, and the two old men formed a tableau which might have been taken for Hypocrisy and Corruption sealing a project of union.

Their joy increased the more as Madame Dubarry's features grew by degrees darker and darker. She added the finishing stroke to it by rising angrily, which was contrary to all etiquette, as the king was still seated.

The courtiers, like ants, felt the storm approach, and hastened to seek shelter with the strongest. The dauphiness was more closely surrounded by her own friends, Madame Dubarry was more courted by hers.

By degrees the interest of the rehearsal was diverted from its natural course, and was turned in quite a different direction. Colin and Colette were no more thought of, and many spectators thought that it would soon be Madame Dubarry's turn to sing :

"I have lost my love—
Colin leaves me."

"Do you mark," whispered Richelieu to Taverney, "your daughter's immense success?"

And he drew him into the corridor, pushing open a glass door, and causing a looker-on, who had been clinging to the framework in order to see into the hall, to fall backwards.

"Plague take the wretch!" grumbled Richelieu, dusting his sleeve, which the rebound of the door had brushed against, and seeming still more angry when he saw that the looker-on was dressed like a workman of the château.

It was, in fact, a workman with a basket of flowers under his arm, who had succeeded in climbing up behind the glass, from which position he commanded a view of the entire saloon.

He was pushed back into the corridor, and almost overturned; but, although he himself escaped falling, his basket was upset.

"Ah! I know the rascal," said Taverney, angrily.

"Who is it?" asked the duke.

"What are you doing here, scoundrel?" said Taverney.

Gilbert—for the reader has doubtless already recognised him—replied haughtily :

"You see—I am looking."

"Instead of being at your work?" said Richelieu.

"My work is done," said Gilbert, humbly addressing the duke, without deigning to look at Taverney.

"Am I fated to meet this lazy rascal everywhere?" said Taverney.

"Gently, sir," interrupted a voice; "gently. My little Gilbert is a good workman and an industrious botanist."

Taverney turned, and saw M. de Jussieu, who was patting Gilbert on the head. The baron reddened with anger and moved off.

"Valets here!" muttered he.

"Hush!" said Richelieu, "there is Nicole!—look—up there, at the corner of the door. The little buxom witch! she is not making bad use of her eyes either."

The marshal was correct. Partially concealed behind a score of the domestics of Trianon, Nicole raised her charming head above all the others, and her eyes, dilated with surprise and admiration, seemed to devour everything she saw.

Gilbert perceived her, and turned another way.

"Come, come!" said the duke to Taverney; "I fancy the king wishes to speak to you. He is looking this way."

And the two friends disappeared in the direction of the royal box.

Madame Dubarry was standing behind the king, and interchanging signs with M. d'Aiguillon, who was also standing, and who did not lose one of his uncle's movements.

Rousseau, now left alone, admired Andrée; he was endeavouring, if we may use the expression, to fall in love with her.

The illustrious actors proceeded to disrobe in their boxes, which Gilbert had decorated with fresh flowers.

Taverney, left alone in the passage by M. de Richelieu, who had gone to rejoin the king, felt his heart alternately chilled and elated. At last the duke returned and placed his finger upon his lips. Taverney turned pale with joy, and advanced to meet his friend, who drew him beneath the royal box. There they overheard the following conversation, which was quite inaudible to the rest of the company. Madame Dubarry was saying to the king:

"May I expect your majesty to supper this evening?"

And the king replied:

"I feel fatigued, countess; excuse me."

At the same moment, the dauphin entered, treading almost on Madame Dubarry's toes, without seeming to see her.

"Sire," said he, "will your majesty do us the honour of supping with us at Trianon?"

"No, my son; I was just this moment saying to the countess that I feel fatigued. Our young people have made me giddy; I shall sup alone."

The dauphin bowed and retired. Madame Dubarry curtseyed almost to the ground, and, trembling with rage, left the box. When she was gone, the king made a sign to the Duke de Richelieu.

"Duke," said he, "I wish to speak to you about an affair which concerns you."

"Sire——"

"I am not satisfied. I wish you to explain—stay, I shall sup alone; you will keep me company."

And the king looked at Taverney.

"You know this gentleman, I think, duke?"

"Monsieur de Taverney? Yes, sire."

"Ah! the father of the charming singer?"

"Yes, sire."

"Listen, duke!"

And the king stooped to whisper in Richelieu's ears. Taverney clenched his hands till the nails entered the flesh, to avoid showing any emotion. Immediately afterwards Richelieu brushed past Taverney, and said:

"Follow me without making any remark."

"Whither?" asked Taverney, in the same tone.

"No matter; follow me."

The duke moved away. Taverney followed him at a little distance to the king's apartment. The duke entered; Taverney waited in the anteroom.

CHAPTER CX.

THE CASKET.

M. DE TAVERNEY had not to wait long. Richelieu, having asked the king's valet for something his majesty had left upon his dressing-table, soon returned, carrying something the nature of which the baron could not distinguish, on account of the covering of silk which enveloped it.

But the marshal soon relieved his friend from all anxiety. Drawing him into a corner of the gallery:

"Baron," said he, as soon as he saw that they were alone, "you have at times seemed to doubt my friendship for you?"

"Never since our reconciliation," replied Taverney.

"At least, you doubted your own good fortune and that of your children?"

"Oh! as for that—yes."

"Well, you were wrong! Your children's fortune and your own is made with a rapidity which might make you giddy."

"Bah!" said Taverney, who suspected part of the truth, but who, as he was not quite certain, took care to guard against mistakes, "what do you mean?"

"M. Philip is already a captain, with a company paid for by the king."

"It is true—I owe that to you."

"By no means. Then we shall have Mademoiselle de Taverney a marchioness, perhaps!"

"Come, come!" exclaimed Taverney; "how!—my daughter!"

"Listen, Taverney! the king has great taste; and beauty, grace, and virtue, when accompanied by talent, delight his majesty. Now Mademoiselle de Taverney unites all these qualities in a very high degree. The king is therefore delighted with Mademoiselle de Taverney."

"Duke," replied Taverney, assuming an air of dignity at which the marshal could scarcely repress a smile; "duke, what do you mean by 'delighted'?"

Richelieu did not like airs, and replied drily:

"Baron, I am not a great linguist. I am not even well versed in orthography. I have always thought that 'delighted' signified 'content beyond measure.' If you are grieved beyond measure to see the king pleased with the beauty, the talent, the merit of your children, you have only to say so. I am about to return to his majesty."

And Richelieu turned on his heel and made a pirouette with truly juvenile grace.

"You misunderstand me, duke," exclaimed the baron, stopping him. "Ventre bleu! how hasty you are!"

"Why did you say that you were not satisfied?"

"I did not say so."

"You asked for explanations of the king's pleasure—plague take the fool!"

"But, duke, I did not breathe a syllable of that. I am most certainly content."

"Ah! *you*—well, who will be displeased? Your daughter?"

"Oh! oh!"

"My dear friend, you have brought up your daughter like a savage, as you are."

"My dear friend, the young lady educated herself; you may easily imagine that I could not possibly trouble myself with any such matter. I had enough to do to support life in my den at Taverney. Virtue in her has sprung up spontaneously."

"And yet people say that country folks know how to pull up weeds!—In short, your daughter is a prude."

"You mistake: she is a dove."

Richelieu made a grimace. "Well," said he, "the poor child must only look out for a good husband, for opportunities of making a fortune happen rarely with this defect."

Taverney looked uneasily at the duke.

"Fortunately for her," continued he, "the king is so desperately in love with the Dubarry, that he will never think seriously of another."

Taverney's alarm was changed to anguish.

"Therefore," continued Richelieu, "you and your daughter may make your minds easy. I will state the necessary objections to his majesty, and the king will never bestow another thought on the matter."

"But objections to what?—good heavens!" exclaimed Taverney, turning pale, and holding his friend's arm.

"To his making a little present to Mademoiselle Andrée, my dear baron."

"A little present!—What is it?" asked the baron, brimful of hope and avarice.

"Oh! a mere trifle," said Richelieu carelessly, and he took a casket from its silken covering.

"A casket!"

"A mere trifle—a necklace worth a few millions of livres, which his majesty, flattered at hearing her sing his favourite air, wished to present to the fair singer. It is the usual custom. But if your daughter is proud, we will say no more about it."

"Duke, you must not think of it—that would be to offend the king."

"Of course it would; but is it not the attribute of virtue always to offend some person, or some thing?"

"But, duke, consider—the child is not so unreasonable."

"That is to say, it is you, and not your child, who speaks?"

"Oh! I know so well what she will do and say."

"The Chinese are a very fortunate nation," said Richelieu.

"Why?" asked Taverney, astonished.

"Because they have so many rivers and canals in the country."

"Duke, you turn the conversation—do not drive me to despair; speak to me."

"I am speaking to you, baron, and am not changing the conversation at all."

"Then why do you speak of China?—what have its rivers to do with my daughter?"

"A great deal. The Chinese, I repeat, have the happiness of being able to drown their daughters when they are too virtuous, and no one can forbid it."

"Come, duke, you must be just. Suppose you had a daughter yourself."

"Pardieu! I have one; and if any one were to tell me that she is too virtuous, it would be very ill-natured of him—that's all."

"In short, you would like her better otherwise, would you not?"

"Oh! for my part, I don't meddle with my children after they are eight years old."

"Listen to me, at least. If the king were to commission me to offer a necklace to your daughter, and if your daughter were to complain to you?"

"Oh, my dear sir, there is no comparison. I have always lived at court; you have lived like a North American Indian; there is no similarity. What you call virtue, I think folly. Remember, for the future, that nothing is more ill-bred than to say to people—'What would you do in this or that case?' And besides, your comparisons are erroneous, my friend. It is not true that I am about to present a necklace to your daughter."

"You said so."

"I said nothing of the sort. I said that the king had directed me to bring him a casket for Mademoiselle de Taverney, whose voice had

pleased him; but I did not say that his majesty had charged me to give it to her."

"Then, in truth," said the baron, in despair, "I know not what to think. I do not understand a single word—you speak in enigmas. Why give this necklace, if it is not to be given? Why do you take charge of it, if not to deliver it?"

Richelieu uttered an exclamation as if he had seen a spider.

"Ah!" said he; "pouah!—pouah! the Huron—the ugly animal!"

"Who?"

"You, my good friend—you, my trusty comrade—you seem as if you had fallen from the clouds, baron!"

"I am at my wits' end."

"No, you never had any. When a king makes a lady a present, and when he charges M. de Richelieu with the commission, the present is noble and the commission well executed—remember that. I do not deliver caskets, my dear sir—that was M. Lebel's office. Did you know M. Lebel?"

"What is your office, then?"

"My friend," said Richelieu, tapping Taverney on the shoulder, and accompanying this amicable gesture by a sardonic smile, "when I have to do with such paragons of virtue as Mademoiselle Andrée, I am the most moral man in the world. When I approach a dove, as you call your daughter, I do not display the talons of the hawk. When I am deputed to wait on a young lady, I speak to her father. I speak to you, therefore, Taverney, and give you the casket to present to your daughter. Well! are you willing?"—And he offered the casket. "Or do you decline?"—And he drew it back.

"Oh! say at once," exclaimed the baron, "say at once that I am commissioned by his majesty to deliver the present! If so, it assumes quite a correct and paternal character—it is, so to speak, purified from——"

"Purified! Why, you must have suspected his majesty of evil intentions!" said Richelieu, seriously. "Now, you cannot have dared to do that?"

"Heaven forbid! But the world—that is to say, my daughter——"

Richelieu shrugged his shoulders.

"Will you take it?—yes, or no?" asked he.

Taverney rapidly held out his hand.

"You are certain it is moral?" said he to the duke, with a smile, the counterpart of that which the duke had just addressed to him.

"Do you not think it pure morality, baron," said the marshal, "to make the father, who, as you have just said, purifies everything, an intermediate party between the king's delight and your daughter's charms? Let M. Rousseau, of Geneva, who was hovering about here just now, be the judge; he would say that Cato of happy memory was impure compared to me."

Richelieu pronounced these few words with a calmness—an abrupt haughtiness—a precision—which silenced Taverney's objections, and assisted to make him believe that he ought to be convinced. He seized his illustrious friend's hand, therefore, and pressing it:

"Thanks to your delicacy," said he, "my daughter can accept this present."

"The source and origin of the good fortune to which I alluded at the commencement of our tiresome discussion on virtue."

"Thanks, dear duke; most hearty thanks!"

"One word more. Conceal this favour carefully from the Dubarrys. It might make Madame Dubarry leave the king and take flight."

"And the king would be displeased?"

"I don't know, but the countess would not thank us. As for me, I should be lost! Be discreet, therefore——"

"Do not fear. But at least present my most humble thanks to the king."

"And your daughter's—I shall not fail. But you have not yet reached the limits of the favours bestowed upon you. It is you who are to thank the king, my dear sir; his majesty invites you to sup with him this evening."

"Me?"

"You, Taverney. We shall be a select party. His majesty, you and myself. We will talk of your daughter's virtue. Adieu, Taverney, I see Dubarry with Monsieur d'Aiguillon. We must not be perceived together."

And, agile as a page, he disappeared at the further end of the gallery, leaving Taverney gazing at his casket, like a Saxon child who awakens and finds the Christmas gifts which have been placed in his hands while he slept.

CHAPTER CXI.

KING LOUIS XV.'S PETIT SOUPER.

THE marshal found the king in the little salon whither several of the courtiers had followed him, preferring rather to lose their supper than to allow the wandering glance of their sovereign to fall on any others than themselves. But Louis XV. seemed to have something else to do this evening than to look at these gentlemen. He dismissed every one, saying that he did not intend to sup, or that, if he did, it would be alone. All the guests having thus received their dismissal, and fearing to displease the dauphin if they were not present at the fête which he was to give at the close of the rehearsal, instantly flew off like a cloud of parasite pigeons, and winged their way to him whom they were permitted to see, ready to assert that they had deserted his majesty's drawing-room for him.

Louis XV., whom they left so rapidly, was far from bestowing a thought on them. At another time, the littleness of all this swarm of courtiers would have excited a smile, but on this occasion it awoke no sentiment in the monarch's breast—a monarch so sarcastic that he spared neither bodily nor mental defect in his best friends, always supposing that Louis XV. ever had a friend.

No; at that moment Louis XV. concentrated his entire attention on a carriage which was drawn up opposite the door of the offices of Trianon, the coachman seeming to wait only for the step which should announce the owner's presence in the gilded vehicle to urge on his horses. The carriage was Madame Dubarry's, and was lighted by torches. Zamore, seated beside the coachman, was swinging his legs backwards and forwards like a child at play.

At last, Madame Dubarry, who had no doubt delayed in the corridors in the hope of receiving some message from the king, appeared, supported on M. d'Aiguillon's arm. Her anger, or at least her disappointment, was

apparent in the rapidity of her gait. She affected too much resolution not to have lost her presence of mind.

After Madame Dubarry followed Jean, looking gloomy in the extreme, and absently crushing his hat beneath his arm. He had not been present at the representation, the dauphin having forgotten to invite him; but he had stolen into the ante-room somewhat after the fashion of a lackey, and stood pensive as Hippolytus, with his shirt-frill falling over his vest embroidered with silver and red flowers, and not even looking at his tattered ruffles, which seemed in harmony with his sad thoughts. Jean had seen his sister look pale and alarmed, and had concluded from this that the danger was great. Jean was brave in diplomacy only when opposed to flesh and blood, never when opposed to phantoms.

Concealed behind the window-curtain, the king watched this funereal procession defile before him and engulf themselves in the countess's carriage like a troop of phantoms. Then, when the door was closed, and the footman had mounted behind the carriage, the coachman shook the reins, and the horses started forward at a gallop.

"Oh!" said the king, "without making an attempt to see me—to speak to me? the countess is furious!"

And he repeated aloud:

"Yes, the countess is furious!"

Richelieu, who had just glided into the room like an expected visitor, caught these last words:

"Furious, sire! and for what? Because your majesty is amused for a moment? Oh! that is not amiable of the countess."

"Duke," replied Louis XV., "I am not amused; on the contrary, I am wearied and wish for repose. Music enervates me. If I had listened to the countess, I ought to have supped at Luciennes; I ought to have eaten, and, above all, to have drunk. The countess's wines are too strong; I do not know from what vineyards they come, but they overpower me. 'Sdeath! I prefer to take my ease here."

"And your majesty is perfectly in the right," said the duke.

"Besides, the countess will find amusement elsewhere. Am I such an amiable companion? She may say so as much as she likes, but I do not believe her."

"Ah! this time your majesty is in the wrong," exclaimed the marshal.

"No, duke; no, in truth. I count my years, and I reflect."

"Sire, the countess is well aware that she could not possibly have better company, and it is that which makes her furious."

"In truth, duke, I do not know how you manage. You still lead the women as if you were twenty. At that age it is for a man to choose; but at mine, duke——"

"Well, sire?"

"It is for the woman to make her calculations."

The marshal burst into a laugh.

"Well, sire," said he, "that is only an additional reason; if your majesty thinks the countess is amused, let us console ourselves as well as we can."

"I do not say she is amused, duke; I only say that she will, in the end, be driven to seek amusement."

"Ah! sire, I dare not assert that such things have never happened."

The king rose, much agitated.

"Who waits outside?" inquired he.

"All your suite, sire."

The king reflected for a moment.

"But have you any one there?"

"I have Raffe."

"Very good."

"What shall he do, sire?"

"He must find out if the countess really returned to Luciennes."

"The countess is already gone, I fancy, sire."

"Yes, ostensibly."

"But whither does your majesty think she is gone?"

"Who can tell? Jealousy makes her frantic, duke."

"Sire, is it not rather your majesty——?"

"How?—what?"

"Whom jealousy——"

"Duke!"

"In truth, it would be very humiliating for us all, sire."

"I jealous?" said Louis, with a forced laugh; "are you speaking seriously, duke?"

Richelieu did not in truth believe it. It must even be confessed that he was very near the truth in thinking that, on the contrary, the king only wished to know if Madame Dubarry was really at Luciennes, in order to be sure that she would not return to Trianon.

"Then, sire," said he aloud, "it is understood that I am to send Raffe on a voyage of discovery?"

"Send him, duke."

"In the meantime, what will your majesty do before supper?"

"Nothing; we shall sup instantly. Have you spoken to the person in question?"

"Yes, he is in your majesty's antechamber."

"What did he say?"

"He expressed his deep thanks."

"And the daughter?"

"She has not been spoken to yet."

"Duke, Madame Dubarry is jealous, and might readily return."

"Ah! sire, that would be in very bad taste. I think the countess would be incapable of committing such an enormity."

"Duke, she is capable of anything in such moods, especially when hatred is combined with jealousy. She execrates you; I don't know if you were aware of that?"

Richelieu bowed.

"I know she does me that honour, sire."

"She execrates M. de Taverney, also."

"If your majesty would be good enough to reckon, I am sure there is a third person whom she hates even more than me—even more than the baron."

"Whom?"

"Mademoiselle Andrée."

"Ah!" said the king, "I think that is natural enough."

"Then——"

"Yes, but that does not prevent its being necessary to watch that Madame Dubarry does not cause some scandal this evening."

"On the contrary, it proves the necessity of such a measure."

"Here is the maître-d'hôtel; hush! give your orders to Raffe and join me in the dining-room with—you know whom!"

Louis rose and passed into the dining-room, while Richelieu made his

exit by the opposite door. Five minutes afterwards, he rejoined the king, accompanied by the baron.

The king in the most gracious manner bade Taverney good evening. The baron was a man of talent, and replied in that peculiar manner which betokens a person accustomed to good society, and which puts kings and princes instantly at their ease. They sat down to table. Louis XV. was a bad king, but a delightful companion; when he pleased, his conversation was full of attraction for boon companions, talkers, and voluptuaries. The king, in short, had studied life carefully, and from its most agreeable side.

He ate heartily, made his guests drink, and turned the conversation on music.

Richelieu caught the ball at the rebound.

"Sire," says he, "if music makes men agree, as our ballet-master says, and as your majesty seems to think, will you say as much of women?"

"Oh, duke!" replied the king, "let us not speak of women. From the Trojan war to the present time, women have always exercised an influence the contrary of music. You, especially, have too many quarrels to compound with them, to bring such a subject on the tapis. Amongst others, there is one, and that not the least dangerous, with whom you are at daggers drawn."

"The countess, sire! Is that my fault?"

"Of course it is."

"Ah! indeed! Your majesty, I trust, will explain."

"In two words, and with the greatest pleasure," said the king, slyly.

"I am all ears, sire."

"What! she offers you the portfolio of I don't know which department, and you refuse, because, you say, she is not very popular?"

"I?" exclaimed Richelieu, a good deal embarrassed by the turn the conversation was taking.

"Dame! the report is quite public," said the king, with that feigned off-hand good-nature which was peculiar to him. "I forget now who told it to me—most probably the gazette."

"Well, sire!" said Richelieu, taking advantage of the freedom which the unusual gaiety of the august host afforded his guests, "I must confess that on this occasion rumours and even the gazettes have reported something not quite so absurd as usual."

"What!" exclaimed Louis XV., "then you have really refused a portfolio, my dear duke?"

Richelieu, it may easily be imagined, was in an awkward position. The king well knew that he had refused nothing; but it was necessary that Taverney should continue to believe what Richelieu had told him. The duke had therefore to frame his reply so as to avoid furnishing matter for amusement to the king, without at the same time incurring the reproach of falsehood, which was already hovering upon the baron's lips and twinkling in his smile.

"Sire," said Richelieu, "pray let us not speak of effects, but of the cause. Whether I have, or have not refused a portfolio, is a state secret which your majesty is not bound to divulge over the bottle; but the cause for which I should have refused the portfolio had it been offered to me is the important point."

"Oh! oh! duke," said the monarch, laughing; "and this cause is not a state secret?"

"No, sire, and certainly not for your majesty, who is at this moment, I beg pardon of the divinity, the most amiable earthly Amphytrion in the

universe for my friend the Baron de Taverney and myself. I have no secrets, therefore, from my king. I give my whole soul up to him, for I do not wish it to be said that the King of France has not one servant who would tell him the entire truth."

"Let us hear the truth then, duke," said the king; while Taverney, fearing that Richelieu might go too far, pinched up his lips and composed his countenance scrupulously after the king's.

"Sire, in your dominions there are two powers which a minister must obey: the first is, your will; the second, that of your majesty's most intimate friends. The first power is irresistible: none dare to rebel against it; the second is yet more sacred, for it imposes duties of the heart on whosoever serves you. It is termed your confidence. To obey it, a minister must have the most devoted regard for the favourite of the king."

Louis XV. laughed.

"Duke," said he, "that is a very good maxim, and one I am delighted to hear from your lips; but I dare you to proclaim it aloud by sound of trumpet upon the Pont Neuf."

"Oh, I know, sire," said Richelieu, "that the philosophers would be up in arms; but I do not think that their objurgations would matter much to your majesty or to me. The chief point is that the two preponderating influences in the kingdom be satisfied. Well! the will of a certain person, —I will confess it openly to your majesty, even should my disgrace, that is my death, be the consequence — Madame Dubarry's will I could not conform to."

Louis was silent.

"It occurred to me the other day," continued Richelieu, "to look around amongst your majesty's court, and in truth I saw so many noble girls, so many women of dazzling beauty, that had I been King of France I should have found it almost impossible to choose."

Louis turned to Taverney, who, seeing things take such a favourable turn for him, sat trembling with hope and fear, aiding the marshal's eloquence with eyes and breath, as if he would waft forward the vessel loaded with his fortunes to a safe harbour.

"Come, baron, what is your opinion?" said the king.

"Sire," replied Taverney, with swelling heart, "the duke, as it seems to me, has been discoursing most eloquently, and at the same time with profound discernment, to your majesty for the last few minutes."

"Then you are of his opinion, in what he says of lovely girls?"

"In fact, sire, I think there are indeed very lovely young girls at the French court."

"Then you are of his opinion?"

"Yes, sire."

"And, like him, you advise me to choose among the beauties of the court?"

"I would venture to confess that I am of the marshal's opinion, if I dared to believe that it was also your majesty's."

There was a short silence, during which the king looked complaisantly at Taverney.

"Gentlemen," said he, "no doubt I would follow your advice, if I were only thirty years of age. I should have a very natural predilection for it, but I find myself at present rather too old to be credulous."

"Credulous! pray, sire, explain the meaning of the word."

"To be credulous, my dear duke, means to believe. Now, nothing will make me believe certain things."

"What are they?"

"That at my age it would be possible to inspire love."

"Ah, sire," exclaimed Richelieu, "until this moment I thought your majesty was the most polite gentleman in your dominions, but with deep regret I see that I have been mistaken."

"How so?" asked the king, laughing.

"Because, in that case, I must be old as Methuselah, as I was born in '94. Remember, sire, I am sixteen years older than your majesty."

This was an adroit piece of flattery on the duke's part. Louis XV. had always admired this man's age, who had outlived so many younger men in his service; for, having this example before him, he might hope to reach the same advanced period.

"Granted," said Louis; "but I hope you no longer have the pretension to be loved for yourself, duke?"

"If I thought so, sire, I would instantly quarrel with two ladies who told me the contrary only this very morning."

"Well! duke," said Louis, "we shall see; M. de Taverney, we shall see; youth is certainly catching, that is very true."

"Yes, yes, sire; and we must not forget that a powerful constitution like your majesty's always gains and never loses."

"Yet I remember," said Louis, "that my predecessor, when he became old, thought not of such toys as woman's love, but became exceedingly devout."

"Come, come, sire!" said Richelieu; "your majesty knows my great respect for the deceased king, who twice sent me to the Bastille, but that ought not to prevent me from saying that there is a vast difference between the ripe age of Louis XV. and that of Louis XIV. Diable! your most Christian majesty, although honouring fully your title of eldest son of the Church, need not carry asceticism so far as to forget your humanity."

"Faith, no!" said Louis. "I may confess it, since neither my doctor nor confessor is present."

"Well, sire! the king, your grandfather, frequently astonished Madame de Maintenon, who was even older than he, by his excess of religious zeal and his innumerable penances. I repeat it, sire, can there be any comparison made between your two majesties?"

The king this evening was in a good humour. Richelieu's words acted upon him like so many drops of water from the fountain of youth.

Richelieu thought the time had come; he touched Taverney's knee with his.

"Sire," said the latter, "will your majesty deign to accept my thanks for the magnificent present you have made my daughter?"

"You need not thank me for that, baron," said the king. "Mademoiselle de Taverney pleased me by her modest and ingenuous grace. I wish my daughters had still their households to form; certainly, Mademoiselle Andrée—that is her name, is it not——?"

"Yes, sire," said Taverney, delighted that the king knew his daughter's Christian name.

"A very pretty name—certainly Mademoiselle Andrée should have been the first upon the list; but every post in my house is filled up. In the meantime, baron, you may reckon upon my protection for your daughter. I think I have heard she has not a rich dowry?"

"Alas! no, sire."

"Well, I will make her marriage my especial care."

Taverney bowed to the ground.

"Then your majesty must be good enough," said he, "to select a husband; for I confess that, in our confined circumstances—our almost poverty——"

"Yes, yes; rest easy on that point," said Louis; "but she seems very young—there is no haste."

"The less, sire, that I am aware your majesty dislikes marriage."

"Ha!" said Louis, rubbing his hands and looking at Richelieu. "Well! at all events, M. de Taverney, command me whenever you are at all embarrassed."

Then, rising, the king beckoned the duke, who approached.

"Was the little one satisfied?" asked he.

"With what?"

"With the casket."

"Your majesty must excuse my speaking low, but the father is listening, and he must not overhear what I have to tell you."

"Bah!"

"No, I assure you, sire."

"Well, speak!"

"Sire, the little one has indeed a horror of marriage; but of one thing I am certain—viz., that she has not a horror of your majesty."

Uttering these words in a tone of familiarity which pleased the king from its very frankness, the marshal, with his little pattering steps, hastened to rejoin Taverney, who, from respect, had moved away to the doorway of the gallery.

Both retired by the gardens. It was a lovely evening. Two servants walked before them, holding torches in one hand, and with the other pulling aside the branches of the flowering shrubs. The windows of Trianon were blazing with light, and, flitting across them, could be discerned a crowd of joyous figures, the honoured guests of the dauphiness.

His majesty's band gave life and animation to the minuet, for dancing had commenced after supper, and was still kept up with undiminished spirit.

Concealed in a dense thicket of lilac and snowball shrubs, Gilbert, kneeling upon the ground, was gazing at the movements of the shadows through the transparent curtains. A thunderbolt cleaving the earth at his feet would scarcely have distracted the attention of the gazer, so much was he entranced by the lovely forms he was following with his eyes through all the mazes of the dance. Nevertheless, when Richelieu and Taverney passed, and brushed against the thicket in which this night-bird was concealed, the sound of their voices, and, above all, a certain word, made Gilbert raise his head; for this word was an all important one for him.

The marshal, leaning upon his friend's arm, and bending down to his ear, was saying:

"Everything well weighed and considered, baron—it is a hard thing to tell you—but you must at once send your daughter to a convent."

"Why so?" asked the baron.

"Because I would wager," replied the marshal, "that the king is madly in love with Mademoiselle de Taverney."

At these words Gilbert started and turned paler than the flaky snowberries which, at his abrupt movement, showered down upon his head and shoulders.

CHAPTER CXII.

PRESENTIMENTS.

THE next day, as the clock at Trianon was striking twelve, Nicole's voice was heard calling Andrée, who had not yet left her apartment:

"Mademoiselle, mademoiselle, here is M. Philip!"

The exclamation came from the bottom of the stairs.

Andrée, at once surprised and delighted, drew her muslin robe closely over her neck and shoulders, and hastened to meet the young man, who was in fact dismounting in the court-yard of Trianon, and inquiring from the servants at what time he could see his sister.

Andrée therefore opened the door in person, and found herself face to face with Philip, whom the officious Nicole had ran to summon from the court-yard, and was accompanying up the stairs.

The young girl threw her arms round her brother's neck, and they entered Andrée's apartments together, followed by Nicole.

It was then that Andrée for the first time remarked that Philip was more serious than usual—that his smile was not free from sadness—that he wore his elegant uniform with the most scrupulous neatness, and that he held a travelling cloak over his arm.

"What is the matter, Philip?" asked she, with the instinct of tender affection, of which a look is a sufficient revelation.

"My sister," said Philip, "this morning I received an order to join my regiment."

"And you are going?"

"I must."

"Oh!" said Andrée; and with this plaintive exclamation all her courage, and almost all her strength, seemed to desert her.

And although this departure was a very natural occurrence, and one which she might have foreseen, yet she felt so overpowered by the announcement that she was obliged to lean for support on her brother's arm.

"Good heavens!" asked Philip, astonished, "does this departure afflict you so much, Andrée? You know, in a soldier's life, it is a most commonplace event."

"Yes, yes; it is in truth common," murmured the young girl. "And whither do you go, brother?"

"My garrison is at Rheims. You see, I have not a very long journey to undertake. But it is probable that from thence the regiment will return to Strasbourg."

"Alas!" said Andrée; "and when do you set out?"

"The order commands me to start immediately."

"You have come to bid me good-bye, then?"

"Yes, sister."

"A farewell!"

"Have you anything particular to say to me, Andrée?" asked Philip, fearing that this extreme dejection might have some other cause than his departure.

Andrée understood that these words were meant to call her attention to

Nicole, who, astonished at Andrée's extreme grief, was gazing at this scene with much surprise; for, in fact, the departure of an officer to his garrison was not a catastrophe to cause such a flood of tears.

Andrée, therefore, saw at the same instant Philip's feelings and Nicole's surprise. She took up a mantle, threw it over her shoulders, and, leading her brother to the staircase:

"Come," said she, "as far as the park-gates, Philip. I will accompany you through the covered alley. I have, in truth, many things to tell you, brother."

These words were equivalent to a dismissal for Nicole, who returned to her mistress's chamber, while the latter descended the staircase with Philip.

Andrée led the way to the passage which still, even at the present day, opens from the chapel into the garden; but although Philip's look anxiously questioned her, she remained for a long time silent, leaning upon his arm, and supporting her head upon his shoulder.

But at last her heart was too full; her features were over-spread with a death-like paleness, a deep sigh escaped her lips, and tears rushed from er eyes.

"My dear sister—my sweet Andrée!" exclaimed Philip, "in the name of heaven, what is the matter?"

"My friend—my only friend!" said Andrée, "you depart—you leave me alone in this great world, which I entered but yesterday, and yet you ask me why I weep? Ah! remember, Philip, I lost my mother at my birth; it is dreadful to acknowledge it, but I have never had a father. All my little griefs—all my little secrets—I could confide to you alone. Who smiled upon me? Who caressed me? Who rocked me in my cradle? It was you. Who has protected me since I grew up? You. Who taught me that God's creatures were not cast into the world only to suffer? You, Philip—you alone. For, since the hour of my birth, I have loved no one in the world but you, and no one but you has loved me in return. Oh! Philip, Philip," continued Andrée, sadly, "you turn away your head, and I can read your thoughts. You think I am young—that I am beautiful—and that I am wrong not to trust to the future and to love. And yet you see, alas! Philip, it is not enough to be young and handsome, for no one thinks of me.

"You will say the dauphiness is kind, and she is so. She is all perfection; at least, she seems so in my eyes, and I look upon her as a divinity. But it is exactly because she holds this exalted situation that I can feel only respect for her, and not affection. Yet, Philip, affection is necessary for my heart, which if always thrust back on itself must at last break. My father—I tell you nothing new, Philip—my father is not only no protector or friend, but I cannot even look at him without feeling terror. Yes, yes, I fear him, Philip, and still more now, since you are leaving me.

"You will ask, why should I fear him? I know not. Do not the birds of the air and the flocks of the field feel and dread the approaching storm? You will say they are endowed with instinct; but why will you deny the instinct of misfortune to our immortal souls? For some time past everything has prospered with our family; I know it well. You are a captain; I am in the household, and almost in the intimacy, of the dauphiness; my father, it is said, supped last night almost tête-à-tête with the king. Well! Philip, I repeat it, even should you think me mad, all this alarms me more than our peaceful poverty and obscurity at Taverney."

"And yet, dear sister," said Philip sadly, "you were alone there also; I was not with you there to console you."

"Yes, but at least I was alone—alone with the memories of childhood. It seemed to me as if the house where my mother lived and breathed her last owed me, if I may so speak, a protecting care. All there was peaceful, gentle, affectionate. I could see you depart with calmness, and welcome you back with joy. But whether you departed or returned, my heart was not all with you; it was attached also to that dear house, to my gardens, to my flowers, to the whole scene of which formerly you were but a part. Now you are all to me, Philip, and when you leave me I am indeed alone."

"And yet, Andrée, you have now a protector far more powerful than I am."

"True."

"A happy future before you."

"Who can tell?"

"Why do you doubt it?"

"I do not know."

"This is ingratitude towards God, my sister."

"Oh! no, thank heaven, I am not ungrateful to God. Morning and evening I offer up thanks to Him; but it seems to me as if, instead of receiving my prayers with grace, every time I bend the knee, a voice from on high whispers to my heart: 'Take care, young girl, take care!'"

"But against what are you to guard? Answer me. I will admit that a danger threatens you. Have you any presentiment of the nature of this misfortune? Do you know how to act so as best to confront it, or how to avoid it?"

"I know nothing, Philip, except that my life seems to hang by a thread, that nothing will look bright to me from the moment of your departure. In a word, it seems as if during my sleep I had been placed on the declivity of a precipice too steep to allow me to arrest my progress when roused to a sense of my danger; that I see the abyss, and yet am dragged down; and that, you being far away, and your helping hand no longer ready to support me, I shall be dashed down and crushed in the fall."

"Dear sister! my sweet Andrée!" said Philip, agitated in spite of himself by the expression of deep and unaffected terror in her voice and manner, "you exaggerate the extent of an affection for which I feel deeply grateful. Yes, you will lose your friend, but only for a time: I shall not be so far distant but that you can send for me if necessity should arise. Besides, remember that except chimerical fears, nothing threatens you."

Andrée placed herself in her brother's way.

"Then, Philip," said she, "how does it happen that you, who are a man, and gifted with so much more strength, are at this moment as sad as I am? Tell me, my brother, how do you explain that?"

"Easily, dear sister," said Philip, arresting Andrée's steps, for she had again moved forwards on ceasing to speak. "We are not only brother and sister by blood, but in heart and affection; therefore we have lived in an intimate communion of thoughts and feelings, which, especially since our arrival in Paris, has become to me a delightful necessity. I break this chain, my sweet love, or rather it is broken by others, and I feel the blow in my inmost heart. I am sad, but only for the moment, Andrée. I can look beyond our separation; I do not believe in any misfortune, except in that of not seeing you for some months, perhaps for a

year. I am resigned, and do not say 'farewell,' but rather, 'we shall soon meet again.'"

In spite of these consolatory words, Andrée could only reply by sobs and tears.

"Dearest sister," exclaimed Philip, grieved at this dejection, which seemed so incomprehensible to him, "dearest sister, you have not told me all—you hide something from me. In heaven's name, speak!"

And he took her in his arms, pressing her to his heart, and gazing earnestly in her eyes.

"I!" said she. "No, no, Philip, I assure you solemnly. You know the most secret recesses of my heart are open before you."

"Well, then, Andrée, for pity's sake, take courage; do not grieve me so."

"You are right," said she, "and I am mad. Listen: I never had a strong mind, as you, Philip, know better than any one; I have always been a timid, dreaming, melancholy creature. But I have no right to make so tenderly beloved a brother a sharer in my fears, above all when he labours to give me courage, and proves to me that I am wrong to be alarmed. You are right, Philip; it is true, everything here is conducive to my happiness. Forgive me, Philip! You see, I dry my tears—I weep no longer—I smile, Philip—I no not say 'adieu,' but rather, 'we shall soon meet again.'"

And the young maiden tenderly embraced her brother, hiding her head on his shoulder to conceal from his view a tear which still dimmed her eye, and which dropped like a pearl upon the golden epaulette of the young officer.

Philip gazed upon her with that infinite tenderness which partakes at the same time of a father's and a brother's affection.

"Andrée," said he, "I love to see you bear yourself thus bravely. Be of good courage; I must go, but the courier shall bring you a letter every week. And every week let me receive one from you in return."

"Yes, Philip," said Andrée; "yes, it will be my only happiness. But you have informed my father, have you not?"

"Of what?"

"Of your departure."

"Dear sister, it was the baron himself who brought me the minister's order this morning. M. de Taverney is not like you, Andrée, and it seems will easily part with me. He appeared pleased at the thought of my departure, and in fact he was right. Here I can never get forward, while there many occasions may present themselves."

"My father is glad to see you go?" murmured Andrée. "Are you not mistaken, Philip?"

"He has you," replied Philip, eluding the question; "that is a consolation for him, sister."

"Do you think so, Philip? He never sees me."

"My sister, he bade me tell you that this very day, after my departure he would come to Trianon. Believe me, he loves you; only it is after his own fashion."

"What is the matter now, Philip? you seem embarrassed."

"Dearest Andrée, I heard the clock strike—what hour is it?"

"A quarter to one."

"Well, dear sister, I seem embarrassed because I ought to have been on the road an hour ago, and here we are at the gate where my horse is waiting. Therefore——"

Andrée assumed a calm demeanour, and taking her brother's hand:

"Therefore," said she, in a voice too firm to be entirely natural, "therefore, brother, adieu!"

Philip gave her one last embrace.

"To meet soon again," said he; "remember your promise."

"What promise?"

"One letter a week, at least."

"Oh! do you think it necessary to ask it?"

She required a violent effort to pronounce these last words. The poor girl's voice was scarcely audible.

Philip waved his hand in token of adieu, and walked quickly towards the gate. Andrée followed his retreating form with her eyes, holding in her breath in the endeavour to repress her sighs. Philip bounded lightly on horseback, shouted a last farewell from the other side of the gate, and was gone. Andrée remained standing motionless till he was out of sight, then she turned, darted like a wounded fawn amongst the shady trees, perceived a bench, and had only strength sufficient to reach it, and to sink on it powerless and almost lifeless. Then, heaving a deep and heart-rending sigh, she exclaimed:

"Oh, my God! do not leave me quite alone upon earth."

She buried her face in her hands, while the big tears she did not seek to restrain made their way through her slender fingers. At this instant a slight rustling was heard amidst the shrubs behind her. Andrée thought she heard a sigh. She turned, alarmed; a melancholy form stood before her.

It was Gilbert.

CHAPTER CXIII.

GILBERT'S ROMANCE.

As pale, as despairing as Andrée, Gilbert stood downcast before her. At the sight of a man, and of a stranger, for such he seemed at first sight through the thick veil of tears which obscured her gaze, Andrée hastily dried her eyes, as if the proud young girl would have blushed to be seen weeping. She made an effort to compose herself, and restored calmness to her marble features, only an instant before agitated with the shudder of despair. Gilbert was much longer in regaining his calmness, and his features still wore an expression of grief when Mademoiselle de Taverney, looking up, at last recognised him.

"Oh! Monsieur Gilbert again!" said Andrée, with that trifling tone which she affected to assume whenever chance brought her in contact with the young man.

Gilbert made no reply; his feelings were still too deeply moved. The grief which had shaken Andrée's frame to the centre had violently agitated his own. It was Andrée, therefore, who again broke the silence, wishing to have the last word with this apparition.

"But what is the matter, Monsieur Gilbert?" inquired she. "Why do you gaze at me in that woe-begone manner? Something must grieve you. May I ask what it is?"

"Do you wish to know?" asked Gilbert, mournfully, for he felt the irony concealed beneath this appearance of interest.

"Yes."

"Well, what grieves me, mademoiselle, is to see you suffer," replied Gilbert.

"And who told you that I am suffering?"

"I see it."

"You mistake, sir; I am not suffering," said Andrée, passing her handkerchief over her face.

Gilbert felt the storm rising, but he resolved to turn it aside by humility.

"I entreat your pardon, mademoiselle," said he, "but the reason I spoke was that I heard your sobs."

"Ah! you were listening; better and better!"

"Mademoiselle, it was by accident," stammered Gilbert, for he felt that he was telling a falsehood.

"Accident! I regret exceedingly, Monsieur Gilbert, that chance should have brought you here. But even so, may I ask in what manner these sobs which you heard me utter grieved you? Pray inform me."

"I cannot bear to see a woman weep," said Gilbert, in a tone which highly displeased Andrée.

"Am I then a *woman* in M. Gilbert's eyes?" replied the haughty young girl. "I sue for no one's sympathy, but M. Gilbert's still less than another's."

"Mademoiselle," said Gilbert, sadly, "you do wrong to taunt me thus. I saw you sad, and I felt grieved. I heard you say, that now M. Philip was gone, you would be alone in the world. Never, mademoiselle! for I am beside you, and never did a heart beat more devoted to you. I repeat it, Mademoiselle de Taverney cannot be alone in the world while my head can think, my heart beat, or my arm retains its strength."

While he spoke these words, Gilbert was indeed a model of manly elegance and beauty, although he pronounced them with all the humility which the most sincere respect commanded.

But it was fated that everything which the young man did should displease Andrée, should offend her, and urge her to offensive retorts—as if his very respect were an insult, and his prayers a provocation. At first she attempted to rise, that she might second her harsh words with as harsh gestures; but a nervous shudder retained her on her seat. Besides, she reflected that if she were standing, she could be seen from a distance, and seen talking to Gilbert. She therefore remained seated; for she was determined, once for all, to crush the importunate insect before her under foot, and replied:

"I thought I had already informed you, Monsieur Gilbert, that you are highly displeasing to me, that your voice annoys me, that your philosophical speeches disgust me. Then why, when you know this, do you still persist in addressing me?"

"Mademoiselle," replied Gilbert, pale, but self-possessed, "an honest-hearted woman is never disgusted by sympathy. An honest man is the equal of every human being; and I, whom you maltreat so cruelly, deserve, more than any other, perhaps, the sympathy which I regret to perceive you do not feel for me."

At this word *sympathy*, thus twice repeated, Andrée opened her large eyes to their utmost extent, and fixed them impertinently upon Gilbert.

"Sympathy!" said she; "sympathy between you and me, Monsieur Gilbert! In truth I was deceived in my opinion of you. I took you for insolent, and I find you are even less than that—you are only a mad man."

"I am neither insolent nor mad," said Gilbert with an apparent calm which it must have caused his proud disposition much to assume. "No, mademoiselle; nature has made me your equal, and chance has made you my debtor."

"Chance again!" said Andrée, sarcastically.

"Perhaps I should have said Providence. I never intended to have spoken to you of this, but your insults refresh my memory."

"*I* your debtor, sir? Your *debtor*, I think you said? Explain yourself."

"I should be ashamed to find you ungrateful, mademoiselle: God, who has made you so beautiful, has given you, to compensate for your beauty, sufficient defects without that."

This time Andrée rose.

"Stay! pardon me!" said Gilbert; "at times you irritate me too much also, and then I forget for a moment the interest with which you inspire me."

Andrée burst into a fit of laughter so prolonged that it was calculated to rouse Gilbert's anger to the utmost; but to her great surprise Gilbert did not take fire. He folded his arms on his breast, retained the same hostile and determined expression in his fiery glance, and patiently awaited the end of this insulting laugh.

When she had finished:

"Mademoiselle," said Gilbert coldly, "will you condescend to answer one question? Do you respect your father?"

"You take the liberty of catechising me, it seems, Monsieur Gilbert?" replied the young girl with sovereign hauteur.

"Yes, you respect your father," continued Gilbert; "and it is not on account of his good qualities or his virtues, but simply because he gave you life. A father, unfortunately—and you must know it, mademoiselle,—a father is respected only in one relation, but still it gives him a claim. Even more: for this sole benefit"—and Gilbert, in his turn, felt himself animated by an emotion of scornful pity—"you are bound to love your benefactor. Well, mademoiselle, this being established as a principle, why do you insult me? why do you scorn me? why do you hate him who did not indeed give you life, but who saved it?"

"You!" exclaimed Andrée; "you saved my life?"

"Ah! you did not even dream of that," said Gilbert, "or rather you have forgotten it. That is very natural; it occurred nearly a year ago. Well, mademoiselle, I must only therefore inform you of it, or recall it to your memory. Yes, I saved your life at the risk of my own."

"At least, Monsieur Gilbert," said Andrée, deadly pale, "you will do me the favour of telling me when and where."

"The day, mademoiselle, when a hundred thousand persons, crushed one against the other, fleeing from the fiery horses, and the sabres which thinned the crowd, left a long train of dead and dying upon the Place Louis XV."

"Ah! the 31st of May?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

Andrée seated herself, and her features again assumed a pitiless smile.

"And on that day, you say you sacrificed your life to save mine, Monsieur Gilbert?"

"I have already told you so."

"Then you are the Baron Balsamo: I beg your pardon, I was not aware of the fact."

"No, I am not the Baron Balsamo," replied Gilbert, with flashing eye and quivering lip; "I am the poor child of the people—Gilbert, who has the folly, the madness, the misfortune to love you; who, because he loved you like a madman, like a fool, like a sot, followed you into the crowd; who, separated from you for a moment, recognised you by the piercing shriek you uttered when you lost your footing; who, forcing his way to you, shielded you with his arms until twenty thousand arms, pressing against his, broke their strength; who threw himself upon the stone against which you were about to be crushed, to afford you the softer repose of his corpse; and, perceiving among the crowd that strange man who seemed to govern his fellow-men, and whose name you have just pronounced, collected all his strength, all his energy, and raised you in his exhausted arms that this man might see you, seize hold of you, and save you!—Gilbert, who in yielding you up to a more fortunate protector than himself, retained nothing but a shred of your dress, which he pressed to his lips! And it was time, for already the blood was rushing to his heart, to his temples, to his brain. The rolling tide of executioners and victims swept over him, and buried him beneath its waves, while you ascended aloft from its abyss to a haven of safety!"

Gilbert in these hurried words had shown himself as he was—uncultivated, simple, almost sublime, in his resolution as in his love. Notwithstanding her contempt, Andrée could not refrain from gazing at him with astonishment. For a moment he believed that his narrative had been as irresistible as truth—as love. But poor Gilbert did not take into his calculations incredulity, that demon prompted by hatred. Andrée, who hated Gilbert, did not allow herself to be moved by any of the forcible arguments of her despised lover.

She did not reply immediately, but looked at Gilbert, while something like a struggle took place in her mind. The young man, therefore, ill at ease during this freezing silence, felt himself obliged to add, as a sort of peroration:

"And now, mademoiselle, do not detest me as you did formerly, for now it would not only be injustice, but ingratitude, to do so. I said so before, and I now repeat it."

At these words Andrée raised her haughty brow, and in the most indifferent and cutting tone, she asked:

"How long, Monsieur Gilbert, did you remain under M. Rousseau's tutelage?"

"Mademoiselle," said Gilbert, ingenuously, "I think about three months without reckoning the few days of my illness, which was caused by the accident on the 31st of May."

"You misunderstand me," said she, "I did not ask you whether you had been ill or not, or what accidents you may have received. They add an artistic finish to your story, but otherwise they are of no importance to me. I merely wished to tell you, that having resided only three months with the illustrious author, you have profited well by his lessons, and that the pupil at his first essay composes romances almost worthy of the master."

Gilbert had listened with calmness, believing that Andrée was about to reply seriously to his impassioned narration; but at this stroke of cutting irony, he fell from the summit of his buoyant hopes to the dust.

"A romance!" murmured he, indignantly; "you treat what I have told you as a romance!"

"Yes, sir," said Andrée, a "romance—I repeat the word; only you

not force me to read it—for that I have to thank you. I deeply regret that, unfortunately, I am not able to repay its full value; but I should make the attempt in vain—the romance is invaluable."

"And this is your reply?" stammered Gilbert, a pang darting through his heart, and his eyes becoming dim from emotion.

"I do not reply at all, sir," said Andrée, pushing him aside to allow her room to pass on.

The fact was, that Nicole had at that moment made her appearance at the end of the alley, calling her mistress while still a considerable distance off, in order not to interrupt this interview too suddenly, ignorant as she was as to whom Andrée's companion might be, for she had not recognised Gibert through the foliage. But as she approached she saw the young man, recognised him, and stood astounded. She then repented not having made a detour n order to overhear what Gilbert had to say to Mademoiselle de Taverney. The latter addressed her in a softened voice, as if to mark more strongly to Gilbert the haughtiness with which she had spoken to him.

"Well, child," said she, "what is the matter?"

"The Baron de Taverney and the Duke de Richelieu have come to present their respects to mademoiselle," replied Nicole.

"Where are they?"

"In mademoiselle's apartments."

"Come, then."

And Andrée moved away. Nicole followed, not without throwing, as she passed, a sarcastic glance back at Gilbert, who, livid with agitation, and almost frantic with rage, shook his clenched hand in the direction of his departing enemy, and, grinding his teeth, muttered:

"Oh! creature without heart, without soul! I saved your life, I concentrated all my affection on you, I extinguished every feeling which might offend your purity, for in my madness I looked upon you as some superior being—the inhabitant of a higher sphere! Now that I have seen you more nearly, I find you are no more than a woman—and I am a man! But one day or other, Andrée de Taverney, I shall be revenged!"

He rushed from the spot, bounding through the thickest of the shrubs like a young wolf wounded by the hunter, who turns and shows his sharp teeth and his bloodshot eyeballs.

CHAPTER CXIV.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

WHEN she reached the opposite extremity of the alley, Andrée saw her father and the marshal walking up and down before the vestibule, waiting for her. The two friends seemed in high spirits, and, as they stood with their arms interlaced, presented the most perfect representation of Orestes and Pylades the court had ever witnessed. As Andrée approached, the two old men seemed still more joyous, and remarked to each other on her radiant beauty, heightened by her walk and by the emotion she had previously undergone.

The marshal saluted Andrée as he would have done a declared Madame

Pompadour. This distinction did not escape Taverney, who was delighted at it, but it surprised Andrée, from its mixture of respect and gallantry; for the cunning courtier could express as many shades of meaning in a bow as Covielle could French phrases by a single Turkish word.

Andrée returned the marshal's salutation, made one equally ceremonious to her father, and then, with fascinating grace, she invited both to follow her to her apartment.

The marshal admired the exquisite neatness which was the only ornament of the furniture and architecture of this retreat. With a few flowers and a little white muslin, Andrée had made her rather gloomy chamber, not a palace indeed, but a temple.

The duke seated himself upon an arm-chair covered with green chintz, beneath a Chinese cornucopia from which drooped bunches of perfumed acacia and maple, mingled with iris and Bengal roses.

Taverney occupied a similar chair; and Andrée sank upon a folding stool, her arm resting on a harpsichord also ornamented with flowers, arranged in a large Dresden vase.

"Mademoiselle," said the marshal, "I come as the bearer, on the part of his majesty, of the compliments which your charming voice and your musical talents drew from every auditor of yesterday's rehearsal. His majesty feared to arouse jealousy by praising you too openly at the time, and he therefore charged me to express to you the pleasure you have caused him."

Andrée blushed, and her blush made her so lovely that the marshal proceeded as if speaking on his own account.

"The king has assured me," said he, "that he never saw any one at his court who united to such a high degree the gifts of mind and the charms of personal beauty."

"You forget those of the heart," said Taverney, with a gush of affection: "Andrée is the best of daughters."

The marshal thought for a moment that his old friend was about to weep. Admiring deeply this display of paternal sensibility, he exclaimed:

"The heart! alas, my dear friend! you alone can judge of the tenderness of which mademoiselle's heart is capable. Were I only five-and-twenty years of age, I would lay my life and my fortune at her feet!"

Andrée did not know how to receive coolly the full fire of a courtier's homage. She could only murmur some almost inaudible words.

"Mademoiselle," continued he, "the king requests you will accept a slight testimony of his satisfaction, and he has charged the baron, your father, to transmit it to you. What reply shall I make to his majesty from you?"

"Sir," replied Andrée, animated by no feeling but that respect which is due to a monarch from all his subjects, "assure his majesty of my deep gratitude; tell him that he honours me too highly by deigning to think of me, and that I am not worthy the attention of so powerful a monarch."

Richelieu seemed in raptures at this reply, which Andrée pronounced with a firm voice, and without hesitation. He took her hand, kissed it respectfully, and devouring her with his eyes:

"A royal hand," said he, "a fairy foot—mind, purity, resolution!—ah! baron, what a treasure! It is not a daughter whom you have—it is a queen!"

With these words he retired, leaving Taverney alone with Andrée, his heart swelling with pride and hope.

Whoever had seen this advocate of antiquated theories, this sceptic, this scoffer, inhaling with delight the air of favouritism in its most disreputable channel, would have said that God had blinded at the same moment both his intellect and heart. Taverney alone might have replied, with reference to this change :

"It is not I who have changed—it is the times."

He remained, then, seated beside Andrée, and could not help feeling somewhat embarrassed ; for the young girl, with her air of unconquerable serenity, and her clear, limpid, unfathomable look, seemed as if she would penetrate his most secret thoughts.

"Did not M. de Richelieu, sir, say that his majesty had entrusted you with a testimony of his satisfaction ? May I ask what it is ?"

"Ah !" thought Taverney, "she is curious—so much the better ! I could not have expected it. So much the better !"

He drew the casket, which the marshal had given him the evening before, slowly from his pocket, just as a kind papa produces a paper of sweetmeats or a toy, which the children have devoured with their eyes before their hands can reach them.

"Here it is," said he.

"Ah ! jewels !" said Andrée.

"Are they to your taste ?"

It was a set of pearls of great value. Twelve immense diamonds connected together the rows of pearls, while a diamond clasp, earrings, and a tiara of the same precious material, made the present worth at least thirty thousand crowns.

"Good heavens, father !" exclaimed Andrée.

"Well ?"

"It is too handsome. The king has made some mistake. I should be ashamed to wear that. I have no dresses suitable to the splendour of these diamonds."

"Oh ! complain of it, I beg !" said Taverney, ironically.

"You do not understand me, sir. I regret that I cannot wear these jewels, because they are too beautiful."

"The king, who gives the casket, mademoiselle, is generous enough to add the dresses."

"But, sir, this is goodness on the king's part——"

"Do you not think I have deserved it by my services ?"

"Ah ! pardon me, sir ; that is true," said Andrée, drooping her head, but not quite convinced.

After a moment's reflection, she closed the casket.

"I shall not wear these diamonds," said she.

"And why not ?" said Taverney, uneasily.

"Because, my dear father, you and my brother are in want of necessaries, and this superfluity offends my eyes when I think of your embarrassments."

Taverney smiled and pressed her hand.

"Oh !" said he, "do not think of that, my daughter. The king has done more for me than for you. We are in favour, my dear child. It would neither be respectful as a subject, nor grateful as a woman, to appear before his majesty without the present he has made you."

"I shall obey, sir."

"Yes, but you must obey as if it gave you pleasure to do so. These ornaments seem not to be to your taste."

"I am no judge of diamonds, sir."

"Learn, then, that the pearls alone are worth fifty thousand livres."

Andrée clasped her hands.

"Sir," said she, "it is most strange that his majesty should make me such a present; reflect!"

"I do not understand you, mademoiselle," replied Taverney, drily.

"If I wear these jewels, I assure you, sir, every one will be greatly surprised."

"Why?" asked Taverney in the same tone, and with a cold and imperious glance which made Andrée lower her eyes.

"I feel a scruple."

"Mademoiselle, you must confess that it is strange you should entertain scruples, when even I, your father, feel none. Give me your young modest girls for seeing evil and finding it out, however closely hidden it is, and when none other had remarked it! None like maidenly and simple girls for making old grenadiers like myself blush!"

Andrée hid her blushing face in her lovely white hands.

"Oh! my brother," she murmured to herself, "why are you already so far from me?"

Did Taverney hear these words, or did he guess their purport with that wonderful perspicacity which we know he possessed? We cannot tell, but he immediately changed his tone, and, taking Andrée's hand in his:

"Come, my child," said he, "is not your father your friend?"

A heavenly smile chased the shadow from Andrée's brow.

"Shall I not be here to love you—to advise you? Are you not proud to contribute to my happiness and that of your brother?"

"Oh, yes!" said Andrée.

The baron fixed a caressing look upon his daughter.

"Well!" said he, "you shall be, as M. de Richelieu said just now, the queen of Taverney. The king has distinguished you, and the dauphiness also," added he, hastily. "In your intimacy with these two august personages, you will found our future fortunes by making them happy. The friend of the dauphiness, and—of the king! What a glorious career! You have superior talents and unrivalled beauty, a pure and healthy mind untainted by avarice and ambition. Oh! my child, what a part you might play! Do you remember the maiden who soothed the last moments of Charles VI.? Her name is cherished in France. Do you remember Agnes Sorel, who restored the honour of the French crown? All good Frenchmen respect her memory. Andrée, you will be the support of the old age of our glorious monarch. He will cherish you as his daughter, and you will reign in France by the divine right of beauty, courage, and fidelity!"

Andrée opened her eyes wide with astonishment. The baron resumed without giving her time to reflect.

"With a single look you will drive away these wretched creatures who dishonour the throne; your presence will purify the court. To your generous influence the nobility of the kingdom will owe the return of pure morals, politeness, and real gallantry. My daughter, you may be, you must be, the regenerating star of your country, and a crown of glory to your name."

"But," said Andrée, all bewildered, "what must I do to effect all this?"

The baron reflected for a moment.

"Andrée," said he, "I have often told you that in this world you must force men to be virtuous by making them love virtue. Sullen, melancholy, sermonizing virtue makes even those fly who wish most to approach her.

Lend to your virtue all the allurements of coquetry—I had almost said of vice. It is an easy task for a talented and high-minded girl such as you are. Make yourself so lovely that the court shall talk only of you ; make yourself so agreeable to the king that he cannot do without you. Be so reserved and discreet towards all, except his majesty, that people will soon attribute to you all that power which you cannot fail ultimately to obtain."

"I do not exactly understand your last advice," said Andrée.

"Trust yourself to my guidance—you will fulfil my wishes without understanding them ; the best plan for such a wise and generous creature as you are. But, by-the-bye, to enable you to put in practice my first counsel, I must furnish your purse. Take these hundred louis-d'ors and dress in a manner worthy of the rank to which you belong, since his majesty has distinguished you."

Taverney gave the hundred louis to his daughter, kissed her hand, and left her.

He returned with rapid steps along the alley by which he had come, so much engrossed in his reflections that he did not perceive Nicole in eager conference with a nobleman at the extremity of the Bosquet des Amours.

CHAPTER CXV.

WHAT ALTHOTAS WANTED TO COMPLETE HIS ELIXIR.

THE day subsequent to this conversation, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Balsamo was seated in his cabinet, in the Rue Saint Claude, occupied in reading a letter which Fritz had just brought him. The letter was without signature. He turned it over and over in his hands.

"I know this writing," said he ; "large, irregular, slightly tremulous, and full of faults in orthography."

And he read it once more. It ran as follows :

"MY LORD COUNT,—

"A person who consulted you some time before the fall of the late ministry, and who had consulted you a long time previously, will wait upon you to-day, in order to have another consultation. Will your numerous occupations permit you to grant this person a quarter of an hour between four and five this evening ?"

After reading this for the second or third time, Balsamo fell back into his train of reflection.

"It is not worth while to consult Lorenza for such a trifle," said he ; "besides, can I no longer guess myself? The writing is large—a sign of aristocracy ; irregular and trembling—a sign of age ; full of faults in orthography—it must be a courtier.—Ah ! stupid creature that I am ! it is the Duke de Richelieu ! Most certainly I shall have a half-hour at your service, my lord duke—an hour did I say?—a day ! Make my time your own. Are you not, without knowing it, one of my mysterious agents, one of my familiar demons ? Do we not both pursue the same task ? Do we not both shake the monarchy at the same time—you by making yourself

its presiding genius, I by declaring myself its enemy? Come, then, duke, I am ready!"

And Balsamo consulted his watch to see how long he must yet wait for the duke. At that moment a bell sounded in the cornice of the ceiling.

"What can be the matter?" said Balsamo, starting; "Lorenza calls me—she wishes to see me. Can anything unpleasant have happened to her? or is it a return of those fits of passion which I have so often witnessed, and of which I have been at times the victim? Yesterday she was thoughtful, gentle, resigned; she was as I loved to see her. Poor child! I must go to her."

He arranged his dress, glanced at the mirror to see if his hair was not too much in disorder, and proceeded towards the stairs, after having replied to Lorenza's request by a ring similar to her own.

But, according to his invariable custom, Balsamo paused in the apartment adjoining that occupied by the young girl, and turning, with his arms crossed, towards the direction where he supposed her to be, he commanded her to sleep, with that powerful will which recognised no obstacles. Then, as if doubting his own power, or as if he thought it necessary to redouble his precautions, he looked into the apartment through an almost imperceptible crevice in the wood-work.

Lorenza was sleeping upon a couch, to which she had, no doubt, tottered under the influence of her master's will, and had sought a support for her sinking limbs. A painter could not have suggested a more poetic attitude. Panting and subdued beneath the power of the subtle fluid which Balsamo had poured upon her, Lorenza seemed like one of those beautiful Ariadnes of Vanloo, with heaving breasts and features expressive of fatigue or despair.

Balsamo entered by his usual passage, and stopped for a moment before her to contemplate her sleeping countenance. He then awoke her.

As she opened her eyes, a piercing glance escaped from between the half-closed lids; then, as if to collect her scattered thoughts, she smoothed back her long hair with her hands, dried her lips, moist with slumber, and seemed to reflect anxiously.

Balsamo looked at her with some anxiety. He had been long accustomed to the sudden transition from winning love to outbursts of anger and hatred; but this appearance, to which he was entirely unused—the calmness with which Lorenza on this occasion received him, instead of giving way to a burst of hatred—announced something more serious, perhaps, than he had yet witnessed.

Lorenza sat up on the couch, and fixing her deep soft eyes upon Balsamo, she said:

"Pray be good enough to take a seat beside me."

Balsamo started at the sound of her voice, expressing as it did such unusual mildness.

"Beside you!" said he. "You know, my Lorenza, that I have but one wish—to pass my life at your feet."

"Sir," replied Lorenza, in the same tone, "I pray you to be seated, although, indeed, I have not much to say to you; but, short as it is, I shall say it better, I think, if you are seated."

"Now, as ever, my beloved Lorenza, I shall do as you wish."

And he took a chair near Lorenza, who was still seated upon the couch.

"Sir," said she, fixing her heavenly eyes upon Balsamo, "I have summoned you to request from you a favour."

"Oh! my Lorenza," exclaimed Balsamo, more and more delighted, "anything you wish! speak—you shall have everything!"

"I wish for only one; but I warn you that I wish for this one most ardently."

"Speak, Lorenza, speak!—should it cost my fortune, or half my life."

"It will cost you nothing, sir, but a moment of your time," replied the young girl.

Balsamo, enchanted with the turn the conversation was taking, was already tasking his fertile imagination to supply a list of those wishes which Lorenza was likely to form, and, above all, those which he could satisfy. "She will, perhaps," thought he, "ask for a servant or a companion. Well! even this immense sacrifice—for it would compromise my secret and my friends—I will make, for the poor child is in truth very unhappy in her solitude."

"Speak quickly, my Lorenza," said he aloud, with a smile full of love.

"Sir," said she, "you are aware that I am pining away with melancholy and weariness."

Balsamo sighed, and bent his head in token of assent.

"My youth," continued Lorenza, "is wasted; my days are one long sigh—my nights a continual terror. I am growing old in solitude and anguish."

"Your life is what you have made it, Lorenza," said Balsamo; "it is not my fault that this life which you have made so sad is not one to make a queen envious."

"Be it so. Therefore it is I, you see, who have recourse to you in my distress."

"Thanks, Lorenza."

"You are a good Christian, you have sometimes told me, although——"

"Although you think me lost to heaven, you would say. I complete your thought, Lorenza."

"Suppose nothing except what I tell you, sir; and pray do not conjecture thus groundlessly."

"Proceed, then."

"Well! instead of leaving me plunged in this despair and wrath, grant me, since I am of no service to you——"

She stopped to glance at Balsamo, but he had regained his command over himself, and she only saw a cold look and contracted brow bent upon her.

She became animated as she met his almost threatening eye.

"Grant me," continued she, "not liberty—for I know that some mysterious secret, or rather your will, which seems all-powerful to me, condemns me to perpetual captivity—but at least to see human faces, to hear other voices than yours—permit me, in short, to go out, to walk, to take exercise."

"I had foreseen this request, Lorenza," said Balsamo, taking her hand; "and you know that long since your wish has been also my own."

"Well, then!" exclaimed Lorenza.

"But," resumed Balsamo, "you have yourself prevented it. Like a madman that I was—and every man who loves is such—I allowed you to penetrate into some of my secrets, both of science and politics. You know that Althotas has discovered the philosopher's stone, and seeks the elixir of life. You know that I and my companions conspire against the

monarchies of this world. The first of these secrets would cause me to be burnt as a sorcerer—the other would be sufficient to condemn me to be broken on the wheel for high treason. Besides, you have threatened me, Lorenza—you have told me that you would try every means to regain your liberty; and, this liberty once regained, that the first use you would make of it would be to denounce me to M. de Sartines. Did you not say so?"

"What can you expect? At times I lash myself to fury, and then I am half mad."

"Are you calm and sensible now, Lorenza?—and can we converse quietly together?"

"I hope so."

"If I grant you the liberty you desire, shall I find in you a devoted and submissive wife—a faithful and gentle companion? You know, Lorenza, this is my most ardent wish."

The young girl was silent.

"In one word—will you love me?" asked Balsamo, with a sigh.

"I am unwilling to promise what I cannot perform," said Lorenza; "neither love nor hatred depends upon ourselves. I hope that God, in return for your good actions, will permit my hatred towards you to take flight, and love to return."

"Unfortunately, Lorenza, such a promise is not a sufficient guarantee that I may trust you. I require a positive, sacred oath, to break which would be a sacrilege—an oath which binds you in this world as in the next—which would bring with it your death in this world and your damnation in that which is to come."

Lorenza was silent.

"Will you take this oath?"

Lorenza hid her face in her hands, and her breast heaved under the influence of contending emotions.

"Take this oath, Lorenza, as I shall dictate it in the solemn terms in which I shall clothe it, and you shall be free."

"What must I swear, sir?"

"Swear that you will never, under any pretext, betray what has come to your knowledge relative to the secrets of Althotas."

"Yes, I will swear it."

"Swear that you will never divulge what you know of our political meetings."

"I will swear that also."

"With the oath and in the form which I shall dictate?"

"Yes. Is that all?"

"No; swear—and this is the principal one, Lorenza; for the other matters would only endanger my life, whilst upon the one I am about to name depends my entire happiness—swear that you will never, either at the instigation of another's will or in obedience to your own, leave me, Lorenza. Swear this, and you are free."

The young girl started as if cold steel had pierced her heart.

"And in what form must the oath be taken?"

"We will enter a church together, and communicate at the same altar. You will swear on the host never to betray anything relating to Althotas or my companions. You will swear never to leave me. We will then divide the host in two, and each will take the half, you swearing before God that you will never betray me, and I that I will ever do my utmost to make you happy."

"No!" said Lorenza; "such an oath is a sacrilege."

"An oath, Lorenza, is never a sacrilege," replied Balsamo sadly, "but when you make it with the intention of not keeping it."

"I will not take this oath," said Lorenza; "I should fear to peril my soul."

"It is not—I repeat it—in taking an oath that you peril your soul; it is in breaking it."

"I cannot do it."

"Then learn patience, Lorenza," said Balsamo, without anger, but with the deepest sadness.

Lorenza's brow darkened like an overshadowed plain when a cloud passes between it and the sun.

"Ah! you refuse?" said she.

"Not so, Lorenza; it is you who refuse."

A nervous movement indicated all the impatience the young girl felt at these words.

"Listen, Lorenza!" said Balsamo. "This is what I will do for you, and, believe me, it is much."

"Speak!" said the young girl, with a bitter smile. "Let me see how far your generosity will extend."

"God, chance, or fate—call it what you will, Lorenza, has united us in an indissoluble bond; do not attempt to break this bond in this life, for death alone can accomplish that."

"Proceed; I know that," said Lorenza impatiently.

"Well, in one week, Lorenza—whatever it may cost me, and however great the sacrifice I make—in eight days you shall have a companion."

"Where?" asked she.

"Here."

"Here!" she exclaimed, "behind these bars—behind these inexorable doors, these iron doors—a fellow-prisoner! Oh, you cannot mean it, sir; that is not what I ask."

"Lorenza, it is all that I can grant."

The young girl made a more vehement gesture of impatience.

"My sweetest girl," resumed Balsamo mildly, "reflect a little; with a companion you will more easily support the weight of this necessary misfortune."

"You mistake, sir. Until now I have grieved only for myself, not for others. This trial only was wanting, and I see that you wish to make me undergo it. Yes, you will immure beside me a victim like myself; I shall see her grow thinner and paler, and pine away with grief, even as I do. I shall see her dash herself, as I do, against these walls—that hateful door—which I examine twenty times each day to see where it opens to give you egress; and when my companion, your victim, has, like me, wounded her hands against the marble blocks in her endeavours to disjoin them; when, like me, she has worn out her eyelids with her tears; when she is dead as I am, in soul and mind, and you have two corpses in place of one, you will say, in your hateful benevolence: 'These two young creatures amuse themselves—they keep each other company—they are happy! Oh! no, no, no!—a thousand times no!'"

And she passionately stamped her foot upon the ground, while Balsamo endeavoured in vain to calm her.

"Come, Lorenza," said he, "I entreat you to show a little more mildness and calmness. Let us reason on the matter."

"He asks me to be calm, to be gentle, to reason! The executioner tells the victim whom he is torturing to be gentle, and the innocent martyr to be calm!"

"Yes, Lorenza; I ask you to be gentle and calm, for your anger cannot change our destiny; it only embitters it. Accept what I offer you, Lorenza; I will give you a companion who will hug her chains, since they have procured for her your friendship. You shall not see a sad and tearful face, such as you fear, but smiles and gaiety which will smooth your brow. Come, dearest Lorenza, accept what I offer; for I swear to you that I cannot offer you more."

"That means that you will place near me a hireling, to whom you will say: 'I give you in charge a poor insane creature, who imagines herself ill and about to die; soothe her, share her confinement, attend to her comforts, and I will recompense you when she is no more.'"

"Oh, Lorenza! Lorenza!"

"No, that is not it; I am mistaken," continued Lorenza, with bitter irony; "I guess badly. But what can you expect? I am so ignorant. I know so little of the world. You will say to the woman: 'Watch over the madwoman, she is dangerous; report all her actions, all her thoughts to me. Watch over her waking and sleeping.' And you will give her as much gold as she requires, for gold costs you nothing—you make it."

"Lorenza, you wander; in the name of heaven, Lorenza, read my heart better! In giving you a companion, my beloved, I compromise such mighty interests that you would tremble for me if you did not hate me. In giving you a companion, I endanger my safety, my liberty, my very life; and, notwithstanding, I risk all to save you a little weariness."

"Weariness!" exclaimed Lorenza, with a wild and frantic laugh which made Balsamo shudder. "He calls it weariness!"

"Well! suffering. Yes, you are right, Lorenza; they are poignant sufferings. I repeat, Lorenza, have patience; a day will come when your sufferings will cease—a day will come when you shall be free and happy."

"Will you permit me to retire to a convent and take the vows?"

"To a convent?"

"I will pray—first for you and then for myself. I shall be closely confined indeed, but I shall at least have a garden, air, space. I shall have a cemetery to walk in, and can seek beforehand among the tombs for the place of my repose. I shall have companions who grieve for their own sorrows, and not for mine. Permit me to retire to a convent, and I will take any vows you wish. A convent, Balsamo! I implore you on my knees to grant this request."

"Lorenza! Lorenza! we cannot part. Mark me well—we are indissolubly connected in this world! Ask for nothing which exceeds the limits of the house."

Balsamo pronounced these last words in so calm and determined a tone that Lorenza did not even repeat the request.

"Then you refuse me?" said she, dejectedly.

"I cannot grant it."

"Is what you say irrevocable?"

"It is."

"Well, I have something else then to ask," said she, with a smile.

"Oh! my good Lorenza, ever smile thus—only smile upon me, and I will compel me to do all you wish!"

"Oh, yes, I shall make you do all that I wish, provided I do everything that pleases you. Well! be it so; I will be as reasonable as possible."

"Speak, Lorenza, speak!"

"Just now you said: 'One day, Lorenza, your sufferings shall cease—one day you shall be free and happy.'"

"Oh, yes, I said so, and I swear before heaven that I await that day as impatiently as yourself."

"Well, this day may arrive immediately, Balsamo," said the young Italian, with a caressing smile, which her husband had hitherto only seen in her sleep. "I am weary, very weary—you can understand my feelings; I am so young, and have already suffered so much! Well, my friend—for you say you are my friend—listen to me; grant me this happy day immediately."

"I hear you," said Balsamo, inexpressibly agitated.

"I end my appeal by the request I should have made at the commencement, Acharat."

The young girl shuddered.

"Speak, my beloved!"

"Well! I have often remarked, when you made experiments on some unfortunate animal, and when you told me that these experiments were necessary to the cause of humanity—I have often remarked that you possessed the secret of inflicting death, sometimes by a drop of poison, sometimes by an opened vein; that this death was calm, rapid as lightning, and that these unfortunate and innocent creatures, condemned as I am to the miseries of captivity, were instantly liberated by death, the first blessing they had received since their birth. Well——"

She stopped and turned pale.

"Well, my Lorenza?" repeated Balsamo.

"Well, what you sometimes do to these unfortunate animals for the interest of science, do now to me in the name of humanity. Do it for a friend, who will bless you with her whole heart, who will kiss your hands with the deepest gratitude, if you grant her what she asks. Do it, Balsamo, for me, who kneel here at your feet, who promise you with my last sigh more love and happiness than you caused me during my whole life!—for me, Balsamo, who promise you a frank and beaming smile as I quit this earth. By the soul of your mother! by the sufferings of our blessed Lord! by all that is holy and solemn and sacred in the world of the living and of the dead! I implore you, kill me! kill me!"

"Lorenza!" exclaimed Balsamo, taking her in his arms as she rose after uttering these last words; "Lorenza, you are delirious. Kill you! You! my love! my life!"

Lorenza disengaged herself by a violent effort from Balsamo's grasp, and fell on her knees.

"I will never rise," said she, "until you have granted my request. Kill me without a shock, without violence, without pain; grant me this favour, since you say you love me—send me to sleep as you have often done—only take away the awaking—it is despair!"

"Lorenza, my beloved!" said Balsamo. "Oh, God! do you not see how you torture my heart? What! you are really so unhappy, then? Come, my Lorenza, rise; do not give way to despair. Alas! do you hate me then so very much?"

"I hate slavery, constraint, solitude; and as you make me a slave, unhappy and solitary—well, yes! I hate you!"

"But I love you too dearly to see you die, Lorenza. You shall not die, therefore; I will effect the most difficult cure I have yet undertaken, my Lorenza—I will make you love life."

"No, no, that is impossible; you have made me long for death."

"Lorenza, for pity's sake!—I promise that soon——"

"Life or death!" exclaimed the young woman, becoming more and more excited. "This is the decisive day—will you give me life, that is to say liberty?—will you give me death, that is to say repose?"

"Life, my Lorenza! life!"

"Then that is liberty."

Balsamo was silent.

"If not, death—a gentle death—by a draught, a needle's point—death during sleep! Repose! repose! repose!"

"Life and patience, Lorenza!"

Lorenza burst into a terrible laugh, and making a spring backwards, drew from her bosom a knife, with a blade so fine and sharp that it glittered in her hand like a flash of lightning.

Balsamo uttered a cry, but it was too late. When he rushed forward and reached the hand, the weapon had already fulfilled its task and had fallen on Lorenza's bleeding breast. Balsamo had been dazzled by the flash—he was blinded by the sight of blood.

In his turn he uttered a terrible cry, and seized Lorenza round the waist, meeting in midway her arm raised to deal a second blow, and receiving the weapon in his undefended hand. Lorenza with a mighty effort drew the weapon away, and the sharp blade glided through Balsamo's fingers. The blood streamed from his mutilated hand.

Then, instead of continuing the struggle, Balsamo extended his bleeding hand towards the young woman, and said with a voice of irresistible command: "Sleep, Lorenza, sleep!—I will it."

But on this occasion the irritation was such that the obedience was not as prompt as usual.

"No, no," murmured Lorenza, tottering and attempting to strike again. "No, I will not sleep!"

"Sleep, I tell you!" said Balsamo, a second time, advancing a step towards her; "sleep, I command it!"

This time the power of Balsamo's will was so great that all resistance was in vain. Lorenzo heaved a sigh, let the knife fall from her hand, and sank back upon the cushions.

Her eyes still remained open, but their threatening glare gradually died away, and finally they closed; her stiffened neck drooped; her head fell upon her shoulder like that of a wounded bird; a nervous shudder passed through her frame—Lorenza was asleep.

Balsamo hastily opened her robe, and examined the wound, which seemed slight, although the blood flowed from it in abundance.

He then pressed the lion's eye, the spring started, and the back of the fireplace opened; then, unfastening the counter-poise which made the trap-door of Althotas's chamber descend, he leaped upon it and mounted to the old man's laboratory.

"Ah! it is you, Acharat," said the latter, who was still seated in his arm-chair, "you are aware that in a week I shall be a hundred years old. You are aware that before that time I must have the blood of a child or of an unmarried female."

But Balsamo heard him not. He hastened to the cupboard in which the magic balsams were kept, seized one of the phials of which he had often proved the efficacy, again mounted upon the trap, stamped his foot and descended to the lower apartment.

Althotas rolled his arm-chair to the mouth of the trap with the intention of seizing him by his dress.

"Do you hear, wretch?" said he; "do you hear? If in a week I have not a child or an unmarried woman to complete my elixir, I am a dead man!"

Balsamo turned; the old man's eyes seemed to glare in the midst of his unearthly and motionless features, as if they alone were alive.

"Yes, yes," replied Balsamo; "yes, be calm; you shall have what you want."

Then, letting go the spring, the trap mounted again, fitting like an ornament in the ceiling of the room.

After which he rushed into Lorenza's apartment, which he had just reached when Fritz's bell rang.

"M. de Richelieu!" muttered Balsamo; "oh! duke and peer as he is, he must wait."

CHAPTER CXVI.

M. DE RICHELIEU'S TWO DROPS OF WATER.

M. DE RICHELIEU left the house in the Rue Saint Claude at half-past four. What his errand with Balsamo was will explain itself in the sequel.

M. de Taverney had dined with his daughter, as the dauphiness had given her leave to absent herself on this day in order that she might receive her father.

They were at dessert, when M. de Richelieu, ever the bearer of good news, made his appearance to announce to his friend that the king would not give merely a company to Philip, but a regiment. Taverney was exuberant in his expressions of joy, and Andrée warmly thanked the marshal.

The conversation took a turn which may be easily imagined after what had passed; Richelieu spoke of nothing but the king, Andrée of nothing but her brother, and Taverney of nothing but Andrée. The latter announced in the course of conversation that she was set at liberty from her attendance on the dauphiness; that her royal highness was receiving a visit from two German princes, her relations; and that in order to pass a few hours of liberty with them which might remind her of the court of Vienna, Marie Antoinette had dismissed all her attendants, even her lady of honour; which had so deeply shocked Madame de Noailles that she had gone to lay her grievances at the king's feet.

Taverney was, he said, delighted at this, since he had thus an opportunity of conversing with Andrée about many things relating to their fortune and name. This observation made Richelieu propose to retire, in order to leave the father and daughter quite alone; but Mademoiselle de Taverney would not permit it, so he remained.

Richelieu was in a vein of moralising; he painted most eloquently the degradation into which the French nobility had fallen, forced as they were to submit to the ignominious yoke of these favourites of chance, these contraband queens, instead of the favourites of the olden times, who were almost as noble as their august lovers—women who reigned over the sovereign by their beauty and their love, and over his subjects by their birth, their strength of mind, and their loyal and pure patriotism.

Andrée was surprised at the close analogy between Richelieu's words

and those she had heard from the Baron de Taverney a few days previously.

Richelieu then launched into a theory of virtue so spiritual, so pagan, so French, that Andrée was obliged to confess that she was not at all virtuous according to M. de Richelieu's theories, and that true virtue, as the marshal understood it, was the virtue of Madame Chateauroux, Mademoiselle de La Valliere, and Mademoiselle Fosseuse.

From argument to argument, from proof to proof, Richelieu at last became so clear that Andrée no longer understood a word of what he said. On this footing the conversation continued until about seven o'clock in the evening, when the marshal rose, being obliged, as he said, to pay his court to the king at Versailles.

In passing through the apartment to take his hat, he met Nicole, who had always something to do wherever M. de Richelieu was.

"My girl," said he, tapping her on the shoulder, "you shall see me or I want you to carry a bouquet which Madame de Noailles cut for me in her garden, and which she commissioned me to present to the Countess d'Egmont."

Nicole curtseyed like the peasant girls in M. Rousseau's comic opera, whereupon the marshal took leave of father and daughter, exchanged a significant glance with Taverney, made a youthful bow to Andrée, and retired.

With the reader's permission, we will leave the baron and Andrée conversing about the fresh mark of favour conferred on Philip, and follow the marshal. By this means we shall know what was his errand at the Rue Saint Claude, where he arrived at such a fearful moment.

Richelieu descended the stairs resting on Nicole's shoulder, and as soon as they were in the garden he stopped, and looking her in the face said:

"Ah! little one, so we have a lover?"

"I! my lord marshal!" exclaimed Nicole, blushing crimson, and retreating a step backwards.

"Oh! perhaps you are not called Nicole Legay?"

"Yes, my lord marshal."

"Well, Nicole Legay has a lover."

"Oh! indeed!"

"Yes, faith, a certain well-looking rascal, whom she used to meet in the Rue Coq-Heron, and who has followed her to Versailles."

"My lord duke, I swear——"

"A sort of exempt, called—shall I tell you, child, how Mademoiselle Legay's lover is called?"

Nicole's last hope was that the marshal was ignorant of the name of the happy mortal.

"Oh! yes, my lord marshal, tell me, since you have made a beginning."

"Who is called M. Beausire," repeated the marshal, "and who in truth does not belie his name."

Nicole clasped her hands with an affectation of prudery which did not in the least impose on Richelieu.

"It seems," said he, "we make appointments with him at Trianon! Peste! in a royal château! that is a serious matter. One may be discharged for these freaks, my sweet one, and M. de Sartines sends the young ladies who are discharged from the royal château to the Salpétrière."

Nicole began to be uneasy.

"My lord," said she, "I swear to you that if M. Beausire boasts of being my lover, he is a fool and a villain, for indeed I am innocent."

"I shall not contradict you," said Richelieu; "but have you made appointments with him or not?"

"My lord duke, a rendezvous is no proof of——"

"Have you or have you not? Answer me."

"My lord——"

"You have. Very well; I do not blame you, my dear child. Besides, I like pretty girls who display their charms, and I have always assisted them in so doing to the utmost of my power. Only, as your friend and protector, I warn you."

"But have I been seen, then?" asked Nicole.

"It seems so, since I am aware of it."

"My lord," said Nicole resolutely, "I have not been seen; it is impossible!"

"As to that, I know nothing; but the report is very prevalent, and must tend to fasten attention on your mistress. Now, you must be aware that being more the friend of the Taverneys than of the Legays, it is my duty to give the baron a hint."

"Oh! my lord!" exclaimed Nicole, terrified at the turn the conversation was taking, "you will ruin me. Although innocent, I shall be discharged on the mere suspicion."

"In that case, my poor child, you shall be discharged at all events; for even now some evil-minded person or other, having taken offence at these rendezvous, innocent though they be, has informed Madame de Noailles of them."

"Madame de Noailles! good heavens!"

"Yes; you see the danger is urgent."

Nicole clasped her hands in despair.

"It is unfortunate, I am aware," said Richelieu; "but what the deuce can you do?"

"And you, who said just now you were my protector—you, who have proved yourself to be such—can you no longer protect me?" asked Nicole, with a wheedling cunning worthy of a woman of thirty.

"Yes, pardieu! I can protect you."

"Well, my lord?"

"Yes, but I will not."

"Oh! my lord duke."

"Yes; you are pretty, I know that, and your beautiful eyes are telling me all sorts of things; but I have lately become rather blind, my poor Nicole, and I no longer understand the language of lovely eyes. Once I would have offered you an asylum in my pavilion of Hanover, but those days are over."

"Yet you once before received me there," said Nicole, angrily.

"Ah! that is ungrateful in you, Nicole, to reproach me with having taken you there, when I did so to render you a service; for confess that without M. Raffe's assistance, who made you a charming brunette, you would never have entered Trianon, which, after all, perhaps, would have been better than to be dismissed from it now. But why the devil did you give a rendezvous to M. Beausire, and at the very gate of the stables, too?"

"So you know that also?" said Nicole, who saw that she must change her tactics, and place herself at the marshal's discretion.

"Parbleu! you see I know it; and Madame de Noailles too. This very evening you have another appointment."

"That is true, my lord; but on my faith I shall not go."

"Of course, you are warned; but M. Beausire is not warned, and he will be seized. Then, as he will not like of course to be taken for a thief and be hanged, or for a spy and be whipped, he will prefer to say—especially as there is no disgrace in confessing it—'Unhand me! I am the lover of the pretty Nicole.'"

"My lord duke, I will send to warn him."

"Impossible, my poor child! by whom could you send? By him who betrayed you, perhaps?"

"Alas! that is true," said Nicole, feigning despair.

"What a becoming thing remorse is!" exclaimed Richelieu.

Nicole covered her face with her hands, taking care, however, to leave space enough between her fingers to allow her to observe every look and gesture of Richelieu.

"You are really adorable!" said the duke, whom none of these little tricks could escape; "why am I not fifty years younger? No matter. Parbleu! Nicole, I will bring you out of the scrape."

"Oh, my lord! if you do that, my gratitude——"

"I don't want it, Nicole. On the contrary, I shall give you most disinterested assistance."

"Oh! how good of you, my lord; I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"Do not thank me yet; as yet you know nothing. Diable! wait till you hear more."

"I will submit to anything, provided Mademoiselle Andrée does not dismiss me."

"Ah! then you are very fond of Trianon?"

"Very, my lord."

"Well, Nicole, in the very first place, get rid of this feeling."

"But why so, if I am not discovered, my lord?"

"Whether you are discovered or not, you must leave Trianon."

"Oh! why?"

"I shall tell you; because if Madame de Noailles has found you out, no one, not even the king, could save you."

"Ah! if I could only see the king."

"In the second place, even if you are not found out, I myself should be the means of dismissing you."

"You?"

"Immediately."

"In truth, my lord marshal, I do not understand you."

"It is as I have had the honour of telling you."

"And that is your protection, is it?"

"If you do not wish for it, there is yet time; you have only to say the word, Nicole."

"Oh, yes! my lord, on the contrary, I do wish for it."

"And I will grant it."

"Well?"

"Well, this is what I will do for you. Hark ye!"

"Speak, my lord."

"Instead of getting you discharged, and perhaps imprisoned, I will make you rich and free."

"Rich and free?"

"Yes."

"And what must I do in order to be rich and free?"

"Almost nothing."

"But what——?"

"What I am about to tell you."

"Is it difficult?"

"Mere child's play."

"Then," said Nicole, "there is something to do?"

"Ah, dame! you know the motto of this world of ours, Nicole—*nothing for nothing!*"

"And that which I have to do, is it for myself or for you?"

The duke looked at Nicole.

"Tudieu!" said he, "the little masker, how cunning she is!"

"Well, finish, my lord duke."

"Well! it is for yourself," replied he, boldly.

"Ah!" said Nicole, who, perceiving that the marshal had need of her services, already feared him no longer, while her ingenious brain was busily endeavouring to discover the truth amid the windings which, from habit, her companion always used; "what shall I have to do for myself, my lord duke?"

"This: M. Beausire comes at half past seven, does he not?"

"Yes, my lord marshal, that is his hour."

"It is now ten minutes past seven."

"That is also true."

"If I say the word he will be arrested."

"Yes, but you will not say it."

"No. You will go to him, and tell him—but in the first place, Nicole, do you love this young man?"

"Why, I have given him a rendezvous."

"That is no reason you may wish to marry him. Women take such strange caprices."

Nicole burst into a loud laugh.

"Marry him!" said she. "Ha! ha! ha!"

Richelieu was astounded: he had not, even at court, met many women of this stamp.

"Well," said he, "so be it. You do not wish to marry him; but in that case you love him. So much the better."

"Agreed! I love M. Beausire. Let us take that for granted, my lord, and proceed!"

"Peste! what strides you make!"

"Of course. You may readily imagine that I am anxious to know what remains for me to do."

"In the first place, since you love him, you must fly with him."

"Dame! if you wish it particularly, I suppose I must."

"Oh! I wish nothing about it—not so fast, little one."

Nicole saw that she was going too far, and that as yet she had neither the secret nor the money of her cunning opponent. She stooped, therefore, only to rise again afterwards.

"My lord," said she, "I await your orders."

"Well! you must go to M. Beausire and say to him: 'We are discovered; but I have a protector who will save you from Saint Lazarus, and me from the Salpêtrière. Let us fly.'"

Nicole looked at Richelieu.

"Fly?" repeated she.

Richelieu understood her cunning and expressive look.

"Parbleu!" said he, "of course, I shall pay the expenses."

Nicole asked for no farther explanation. It was plain that she must know all, since she was to be paid.

The marshal saw what an important point Nicole had gained, and hastened to say all he had to say, just as a gambler is eager to pay when he has lost, in order to have the disagreeable task of paying over.

"Do you know what you are thinking of, Nicole?" said he.

"Faith, no," replied the girl: "but I suppose you, my lord marshal, who know so many things, can guess it."

"Nicole," he replied, "you were reflecting that if you fled, your mistress might require you during the night, and not finding you, might give the alarm, which would expose you to the risk of being overtaken and seized."

"No," said Nicole, "I was not thinking of that, because, after all, my lord, I think I would prefer remaining here."

"But if M. Beausire is taken?"

"Well, I cannot help it."

"But if he confess?"

"Let him confess."

"Ah!" said Richelieu, beginning to be uneasy, "but in that case you are lost."

"No; for Mademoiselle Andrée is kindness itself, and as she loves me at heart, she will speak to the king for me; so, even if M. de Beausire is punished, I shall not share his punishment."

The marshal bit his lip.

"Nicole," said he, "I tell you you are a fool. Mademoiselle Andrée is not on such good terms with the king, and I will have you arrested immediately if you do not listen to me as I wish. Do you hear, you little viper?"

"Oh! my lord, my ears do not serve me so ill. I hear you, but I form my own conclusions."

"Good. Then you will go at once and arrange your plan of flight with M. Beausire."

"But how? Do you imagine, my lord marshal, that I shall expose myself to the risk of flight, when you tell me yourself that mademoiselle might awake, might ask for me, give the alarm, and a great deal more which I know not, but which you, my lord, who are a man of experience, must have foreseen?"

Richelieu bit his lip again, but this time more deeply than he had done before.

"Well, minion, if I have thought of these consequences, I have also thought of how to avoid them."

"And how will you manage to prevent mademoiselle from calling me?"

"By preventing her awaking."

"Bah! she awakes ten times during the night."

"Then she has the same malady that I have?" said Richelieu, calmly.

"The same that you have?" said Nicole, laughing.

"Yes. I also awake ten times every night, only I have a remedy for this sleeplessness. She must use the same remedy, or if not, you will do it for her."

"What do you mean, my lord?"

"What does your mistress take in the evening before she goes to bed?"

"What does she take?"

"Yes, it is the fashion now to drink something in the evening. Some take orangeade or lemonade, others take eau-de-Melisse, others——"

"Mademoiselle drinks only a glass of pure water in the evening before going to bed; sometimes sweetened and flavoured with orange-water, if her nerves are weak."

"Ah! excellent!" said Richelieu, "just as I do myself. My remedy will suit her admirably."

"How so?"

"I pour one drop of a certain liquid in my beverage, and I then never wake all night."

Nicole tasked her brain to discover to what end the marshal's diplomacy tended.

"You do not answer?" said he.

"I was just thinking that mademoiselle has not your cordial."

"I will give you some."

"Ah!" thought Nicole, seeing at last a ray of light through the darkness.

"You must put two drops of it in your mistress's glass—neither more nor less, remember—and she will sleep soundly, so that she will not call you, and consequently you will gain time."

"Oh! if that is all, it is very simple."

"You will give her the two drops?"

"Certainly."

"You promise me?"

"I presume it is for my own interest to do so; besides, I will lock the door so carefully——"

"By no means," said Richelieu hastily. "That is exactly what you must not do; on the contrary, you must leave her room door open."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nicole, with suppressed joy. She now understood all. Richelieu saw it plainly. "Is that all?" inquired she.

"Absolutely all. Now you may go and tell your exempt to pack up his trunks."

"Unfortunately, sir, it would be useless to tell him to fill his purse."

"You know that is my affair."

"Yes, I remember your lordship was kind enough to say——"

"Come, Nicole, how much do you want?"

"For what?"

"For pouring in the two drops of water."

"For that, nothing, my lord, since you assure me I do so for my own interest; it would not be just that you should pay me for attending to my own interest. But for leaving mademoiselle's door open—ah! for that I warn you I must have a good round sum."

"At one word, how much?"

"I must have twenty thousand francs, my lord."

Richelieu started.

"Nicole," said he, with a sigh, "you will make some figure in the world."

"I ought to do so, my lord, for I begin to believe now that I shall attract attention. But with your twenty thousand francs we shall smooth difficulties."

"Go and warn M. Beausire, Nicole; and when you return I will give you the money."

"My lord, M. Beausire is very incredulous, and he will not believe what I tell him unless I can give him proofs."

Richelieu pulled out a handful of bank-notes from his pocket.

"Here is something on account," said he; "in this purse there are a hundred double louis."

"Your lordship will settle the account in full and give me the balance then, when I have spoken to M. Beausire?"

"No, pardieu! I will settle it on the spot. You are a careful girl, Nicole: it will bring you luck."

And Richelieu handed her the promised sum, partly in bank-notes and partly in louis-d'ors and half-louis.

"There!" said he, "is that right?"

"I think so," said Nicole; "and now, my lord, I want only the principal thing."

"The cordial?"

"Yes; of course your lordship has a bottle?"

"I have my own, which I always carry about with me."

Nicole smiled.

"And then," said she, "Trianon is locked every night, and I have no a key."

"But I have one, as first gentleman of the chamber."

"Ah! indeed!"

"Here it is."

"How fortunate all this is!" said Nicole; it is one succession of miracles! And now, my lord duke, adieu!"

"How! adieu?"

"Certainly. I shall not see your lordship again, as I shall go as soon as mademoiselle is asleep."

"Quite right. Adieu then, Nicole!"

And Nicole, laughing in her sleeve, disappeared in the increasing darkness.

"I shall still succeed," said Richelieu. "But in truth it would seem that I am getting old, and fortune is turning against me. I have been outwitted by this little one. But what matters it, if I return the blow?"

CHAPTER CXVII.

THE FLIGHT.

NICOLE was a conscientious girl. She had received M. de Richelieu's money, and received it in advance too, and she felt anxious to prove herself worthy of this confidence by earning her pay. She ran therefore as quickly as possible to the gate, where she arrived at forty minutes past seven, instead of at half-past. Now, M. Beausire, who, being accustomed to military discipline, was a punctual man, had been waiting there for ten minutes. About ten minutes before, too, M. de Taverney had left his daughter, and Andrée was consequently alone. Now, being alone, the young girl had closed the blinds.

Gilbert, as usual, was gazing eagerly at Andrée from his attic, but it

would have been difficult to say if his eyes sparkled with love or hatred. When the blinds were closed Gilbert could see nothing. Consequently he looked in another direction, and, while looking, he perceived M. Beausire's plume, and recognised the exempt, who was walking up and down, whistling an air to kill time while he was waiting.

In about ten minutes, that is to say, at forty minutes past seven, Nicole made her appearance. She exchanged a few words with M. Beausire, who made a gesture with his head as a sign that he understood her perfectly, and disappeared by the shady alley leading to the Little Trianon. Nicole, light as a bird, returned in the direction she had come.

"Oh, oh!" thought Gilbert. "Monsieur the exempt and mademoiselle the femme-de-chambre have something to do or to say which they fear to have witnessed! Very good!"

Gilbert no longer felt any curiosity with respect to Nicole's movements, but actuated by the idea that the young girl was his natural enemy, he merely sought to collect a mass of proofs against her morality, with which proofs he might successfully repulse any attack, should she attempt one against him. And as he knew the campaign might begin at any moment, like a prudent soldier he collected his munitions of war.

A rendezvous with a man, in the very grounds of Trianon, was one of the weapons which a cunning enemy such as Gilbert could not neglect, especially when it was imprudently placed under his very eyes. Gilbert consequently wished to have the testimony of his ears as well as that of his eyes, and to catch some fatally compromising phrase which would completely floor Nicole at the first onset. He quickly descended from his attic, therefore, hastened along the lobby, and gained the garden by the chapel stairs. Once in the garden, he had nothing to fear, for he knew all its hiding-places, as a fox knows his cover. He glided beneath the linden-trees, then along the espalier, until he reached a small thicket situated about twenty paces from the spot where he calculated upon seeing Nicole.

As he had foreseen, Nicole was there. Scarcely had he installed himself in the thicket when a strange noise reached his ears. It was the chink of gold upon stone—that metallic sound of which nothing, except the reality, can give a correct idea.

Like a serpent, Gilbert glided along to a raised terrace, out-topped by a hedge of lilacs, which at that season (early in May) diffused their perfume around, and showered down their flowers upon the passers who took the shady alley on their way from the Great to the Little Trianon.

Having reached this retreat, Gilbert, whose eyes were accustomed to pierce the darkness, saw Nicole emptying the purse which M. de Richelieu had given her, upon a stone on the inner side of the gate, and prudently placed out of M. Beausire's reach.

The large louis-d'ors showered from it in bright profusion, while M. Beausire, with sparkling eye and trembling hand, looked at Nicole and her louis-d'ors as if he could not comprehend how the one should possess the other.

Nicole spoke first.

"You have more than once, my dear M. Beausire," said she, "proposed to elope with me."

"And to marry you," exclaimed the enthusiastic exempt.

"Oh! my dear sir, that is a matter of course; just now, flight is the most important point. Can we fly in two hours?"

"In ten minutes, if you like."

"No; I have something to do first, which will occupy me two hours."

"In two hours, as in ten minutes, I shall be at your orders, dearest."

"Very well. Take these fifty louis."

Nicole counted the fifty louis, and handed them through the gate to M. Beausire, who, without counting them, stuffed them into his waistcoat pocket.

"And in an hour and a half," continued she, "be here with a carriage."

"But——" objected Beausire.

"Oh! if you do not wish, forget what has passed between us, and give me back my fifty louis."

"I do not shrink, dearest Nicole; but I fear the result."

"For whom?"

"For you."

"For me?"

"Yes; the fifty louis—once vanished, and vanished they will soon be—you will complain—you will regret Trianon—you will——"

"Oh! how thoughtful you are, M. Beausire! But fear nothing; I am not one of those women who are easily made miserable. Have no scruples on that score; when the fifty louis are gone, we shall see."

And she shook the purse which contained the other fifty. Beausire's eyes were absolutely phosphorescent.

"I would charge through a blazing furnace for your sake!" exclaimed he.

"Oh! content you—I shall not require so much from you, sir. Then it is agreed you will be here with the chaise in an hour and a half, and in two hours we shall fly?"

"Agreed!" exclaimed Beausire, seizing Nicole's hand, and drawing it through the gate to kiss it.

"Hush!" said Nicole, "are you mad?"

"No; I am in love."

"Hum!" muttered Nicole.

"Do you not believe me, sweetheart?"

"Yes, yes, I believe you—above all, be sure to have good horses."

"Oh! yes."

And they separated.

But a moment afterwards, Beausire returned quite alarmed.

"Hist!" whispered he.

"Well, what is it?" asked Nicole, already some distance off, and putting her hand to her mouth, so as to convey her voice farther.

"And the gate?" asked Beausire, "will you creep under it?"

"How stupid he is!" murmured Nicole, who at this moment was not ten paces distant from Gilbert. Then she added in a louder tone:

"I have the key."

Beausire uttered a prolonged "oh!" of admiration, and this time took to his heels for good and all. Nicole hastened back with drooping head and nimble step to her mistress.

Gilbert, now left sole master of the field, put the following four questions to himself:

"Why does Nicole fly with Beausire, when she does not love him?

"How does Nicole come to possess such a large sum of money?

"Why has Nicole the key of the gate?

"Why does Nicole return to Andrée, when she might go at once?"

Gilbert found an answer to the second question, but to the others he could find none.

Thus checked at the commencement, his natural curiosity and his acquired distrust were so much excited that he determined to remain in the cold, beneath the dew-covered trees, to await the end of this scene, of which he had witnessed the commencement.

Andrée had conveyed her father to the barriers of the Great Trianon, and was returning alone and pensive, when Nicole appeared issuing from the alley leading to the famous gate where she had been concerting her measures with M. Beausire.

Nicole stopped on perceiving her mistress, and upon a sign which Andrée made to her, she followed her to her apartment.

It was now about half-past eight in the evening. The night had closed in earlier than usual; for a huge cloud, sweeping from south to north, had overspread the whole sky, and all around, as far as the eye could reach over the lofty forest of Versailles, the gloomy shroud was gradually enveloping in its folds the stars, a short time before sparkling in the azure dome. A light breeze swept along the ground, breathing warmly on the drooping flowers, which bent their heads, as if imploring heaven to send them rain or dew.

The threatening aspect of the sky did not hasten Andrée's steps; on the contrary, melancholy and thoughtful, the young girl seemed to ascend each step leading to her room with regret, and she paused at every window as she passed to gaze at the sky, so much in harmony with her saddened mood, and thus to delay her return to her own little retreat.

Nicole, impatient, angry, fearing that some whim might detain her mistress beyond the usual hour, grumbled and muttered, as servants never fail to do when their masters are imprudent enough to satisfy their own caprices at the expense of those of their domestics.

At last, Andrée reached the door of her chamber, and sank rather than seated herself upon a couch, gently ordering Nicole to leave the window, which looked upon the court, half open. Nicole obeyed; then, returning to her mistress with that affectionate air which the flatterer could so easily assume, she said:

"I fear mademoiselle feels ill this evening; her eyes are red and swollen, yet bright. I think that mademoiselle is in great need of repose."

"Do you think so?" asked Andrée, who had scarcely listened.

And she carelessly placed her feet upon a cushion of tapestry work.

Nicole took this as an order to undress her mistress, and commenced to unfasten the ribbons and flowers of her headdress—a species of edifice which the most skilful could not unbuild in less than a quarter of an hour. While she was thus employed, Andrée did not utter a word, and Nicole, thus left to follow her own wishes, hastened the business, without disturbing Andrée, whose pre-occupation was so great that she permitted Nicole to pull out her hair with impunity.

When the night toilet was finished, Andrée gave her orders for the morrow. In the morning some books were to be fetched from Versailles which Philip had left there for his sister, and the tuner was to be ordered to attend to put the harpsichord in proper order.

Nicole replied, that if she were not called during the night, she would rise early, and would have both these commissions executed before her young lady was awake.

"To-morrow also I will write to Philip," said Andrée, speaking to herself; "that will console me a little."

"Come what will," thought Nicole, "I shall not carry the letter."

And at this reflection the girl, who was not quite lost yet, began to think,

in saddened mood, that she was about for the first time to leave that excellent mistress under whose care her mind and heart had been awakened. The thought of Andrée was linked in her mind with so many other recollections, that to touch it was to stir the whole chain which carried her back to the first days of infancy.

Whilst these two young creatures, so different in their character and their condition, were thus reflecting beside each other, without any connection existing between their thoughts, time was rapidly flying, and Andrée's little timepiece, which was always in advance of the great clock of Trianon, struck nine.

Beausire would be at the appointed place, and Nicole had but half-an-hour to join her lover.

She finished her task as quickly as possible, not without uttering some sighs which Andrée did not even notice. She folded a night-shawl around her mistress, and as Andrée still sat immovable, with her eyes fixed on the ceiling, she drew Richelieu's phial from her bosom, put two pieces of sugar into a goblet, added the water necessary to melt it, and without hesitation, and by the resolute force of her will, so strong in one so young, she poured two drops of the fluid from the phial into the water, which immediately became turbid, then changed to a slight opal tint, which soon died away.

"Mademoiselle," said Nicole, "your glass of water is prepared, your clothes are folded, the night-lamp is lighted. You know I must rise very early to-morrow morning; may I go to bed now?"

"Yes," replied Andrée, absently.

Nicole curtseyed, heaved a last sigh, which, like the others, was unnoticed, and closed behind her the glass door leading to the anteroom. But instead of retiring into her little cell adjoining the corridor and lighted from Andrée's anteroom, she softly took to flight, leaving the door of the corridor ajar, so that Richelieu's instructions were scrupulously followed.

Then, not to arouse the attention of the neighbours, she descended the stairs on tiptoe, bounded down the outer steps, and ran quickly to join M. Beausire at the gate.

Gilbert had not quitted his post. He had heard Nicole say that she would return in two hours, and he waited. But as it was now ten minutes past the hour, he began to fear that she would not return.

All at once, he saw her running as if some one were pursuing her.

Nicole approached the gate, passed the key through the bars to Beausire who opened it, rushed out, and the gate closed with a dull, grating noise. The key was then thrown among the grass in the ditch, near the spot where Gilbert was stationed. He heard it fall with a dead sound, and marked the place where it had dropped.

Nicole and Beausire in the meantime gained ground; Gilbert heard them move away, and soon he could distinguish, not the noise of a carriage as Nicole had required, but the pawing of a horse, which, after some moment's delay—occupied doubtless by Nicole in recrimination, who had wished to depart, like a duchess, in her carriage—changed to the clattering of his iron-shod feet on the pavement, and at last died away in the distance.

Gilbert breathed freely; he was free, free from Nicole—that is to say, from his enemy. Andrée was henceforth alone.

He took the contrary direction from the one Nicole was pursuing, and hurried towards the offices of Trianon.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

DOUBLE SIGHT.

WHEN Andrée was alone, she gradually recovered from the mental torpor into which she had fallen, and while Nicole was flying en croupe behind M. Beausire, she knelt down and offered up a fervent prayer for Philip, the only being in the world she loved with a true and deep attachment; and while she prayed, her trust in God assumed new strength and inspired her with fresh courage.

The prayers which Andrée offered were not composed of a succession of words strung one to the other; they were a kind of heavenly ecstasy, during which her soul rose to her God and mingled with his spirit.

In these impassioned supplications of the mind, freed from earthly concerns, there was no alloy of self. Andrée in some degree abandoned all thoughts of herself, like a shipwrecked mariner who has lost hope, and who prays only for his wife and his children, soon to become orphans. This inward grief had sprung up in Andrée's bosom since her brother's departure, but it was not entirely without another cause. Like her prayer, it was composed of two distinct elements, one of which was quite inexplicable to her.

It was, as it were, a presentiment, the perceptible approach of some impending misfortune. It was a sensation resembling that of the shooting of a cicatrised wound. The acute pain is over, but the remembrance survives, and reminds the sufferer of the calamity, as the wound itself had previously done. She did not even attempt to explain her feelings to herself. Devoted heart and soul to Philip, she centred in her beloved brother every thought and every affection of her heart.

Then she rose, took a book from her modestly-furnished library, placed the light within reach of her hand, and stretched herself on a couch. The book she had chosen, or rather upon which she had accidentally placed her hand, was a dictionary of botany. It may readily be imagined that this book was not calculated to absorb her attention, but rather to lull it to rest. Gradually, drowsiness weighed down her eyelids, and a filmy veil obscured her vision. For a moment the young girl struggled against sleep; twice or thrice she collected her scattered thoughts, which soon escaped again from her control; then, raising her head to blow out the candle, she perceived the glass of water prepared by Nicole, stretched out her hand and took the glass, stirred the sugar with the spoon, and, already half asleep, she approached the glass to her lips.

All at once, just as her lips were already touching the beverage, a strange emotion made her hand tremble, a moist and burning weight fell on her brow, and Andrée recognised with terror, by the current of the fluid which rushed through her nerves, that supernatural attack of mysterious sensations which had several times already triumphed over her strength and overpowered her mind. She had only time to place the glass upon the plate, when instantly, without a murmur, but with a sigh which escaped from her half-open lips, she lost the use of voice, sight, and reason, and, seized with a death-like torpor, fell back as if struck by lightning upon her

bed. But this sort of annihilation was but the momentary transition to another state of existence. For an instant she seemed perfectly lifeless, and her eyes closed in the slumber of death; but all at once she rose, opened her eyes, which stared with a fearful fixity of gaze, and like a marble statue descending from its tomb, she once more stood upon the floor. There was no longer room for doubt. Andrée was sunk in that marvellous sleep which had several times already suspended her vital functions.

She crossed the chamber, opened the glass door, and entered the corridor, with the fixed and rigid attitude of breathing marble. She reached the stairs, descended step by step without hesitation and without haste, and emerged upon the portico. Just as Andrée placed her foot upon the topmost step to descend, Gilbert reached the lowest on his way to his attic. Seeing this white and solemn figure advancing as if to meet him, he recoiled before her, and, still retreating as she advanced, he concealed himself in a clump of shrubs. It was thus, he recollected, that he had already seen Andrée de Taverney at the château of Taverney.

Andrée passed close by him, even touched him, but saw him not. The young man, thunderstruck, speechless with surprise, sank to the ground on one knee. His limbs refused to support him—he was afraid.

Not knowing to what cause to attribute this strange excursion, he followed her with his eyes; but his reason was confounded, his blood beat impetuously against his temples, and he was in a state more closely bordering on madness than the coolness and circumspection necessary for an observer.

He remained therefore crouching on the grass among the leaves, watching as he had never ceased to do since this fatal attachment had entered his heart. All at once the mystery was explained; Andrée was neither mad nor bewildered, as he had for a moment supposed—Andrée was with this sepulchral step, going to a rendezvous. A gleam of lightning had furrowed the sky, and by its blue and livid light Gilbert saw a man concealed beneath the sombre avenue of linden-trees, and, notwithstanding the rapidity of the flash, he had recognised the pale face and disordered garments of the man, relieved against the dark background.

Andrée advanced towards this man, whose arm was extended as if to draw her towards him.

A sensation like the branding of a red-hot iron rushed through Gilbert's heart; he raised himself upon his knees to see more clearly. At that moment another flash of lightning illumined the sky.

Gilbert recognised Balsamo, covered with dust and perspiration; Balsamo, who, by some mysterious means, had succeeded in entering Trianon, and thus drew Andrée towards him as invincibly, as fatally, as the serpent fascinates its prey.

When two paces from him, Andrée stopped. Balsamo took her hand; her whole frame shuddered.

"Do you see?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Andrée; "but in summoning me so suddenly you have nearly killed me."

"Pardon, pardon!" replied Balsamo; "but my brain reels—I am beside myself—I am nearly mad—I shall kill myself."

"You are indeed suffering," said Andrée, conscious of Balsamo's feeling by the contact of his hand.

"Yes, yes," replied Balsamo, "I suffer, and I come to you for consolation. You alone can save me."

"Question me."

"Once more, do you see?"

"Oh! perfectly."

"Will you follow me to my house? Can you do so?"

"I can, if you will conduct me there in thought."

"Come!"

"Ah!" said Andrée, "we are entering Paris—we follow the boulevard, we plunge into a street lighted by a single lamp."

"Yes, that is it. Enter! enter!"

"We are in an antechamber. There is a staircase to the right, but you draw me toward the wall—the wall opens—steps appear——"

"Ascend!" exclaimed Balsamo, "that is our way."

"Ah! we are in a sleeping-chamber; there are lions' skins, arms—Stay, the back of the fire-place opens."

"Pass through; where are you?"

"In a strange sort of room, without any outlet, and the windows of which are barred. Oh! how disordered everything in the room appears!"

"But empty—it is empty, is it not?"

"Yes, empty."

"Can you see the person who inhabited it?"

"Yes, if you give me something which has touched her, which comes from her, or which belongs to her."

"Hold! there is some hair."

Andrée took the hair and placed it on her heart.

"Oh! I recognise her," said she; "I have already seen this woman. She was flying towards Paris."

"Yes, yes; can you tell me what she has been doing during the last two hours, and how she escaped?"

"Wait a moment; yes: she is reclining upon a sofa; her breast is half bared, and she has a wound on one side."

"Look, Andrée, look! do not lose sight of her."

"She was asleep—she awakes—she looks around—she takes a handkerchief and climbs upon a chair. She ties the handkerchief to the bars of the window—oh! God!"

"Is she really determined to die?"

"Oh, yes! she is resolute. But this sort of death terrifies her. She leaves the handkerchief tied to the bars—she descends—ah! poor woman!"

"What?"

"Oh! how she weeps, how she suffers, and wrings her hands! She searches for a corner of the wall against which to dash her head!"

"Oh! my God! my God!" murmured Balsamo.

"She rushes towards the chimney-piece! It represents two marble lions; she will dash out her brains against the lions!"

"What then? look, Andrée, look—it is my will!"

"She stops."

Balsamo breathed again.

"She looks——"

"What does she look at?" asked Balsamo.

"She has perceived some blood upon the lion's eye."

"Oh, heavens!"

"Yes, blood, and yet she did not strike herself against it. Oh! strange! the blood is not hers, it is yours."

"Mine?" asked Balsamo, frantic with excitement.

"Yes, yours. You had cut your finger with a knife, with a poniard—and had touched the lion's eye with your bleeding hand. I see you."

"True, true. But how does she escape?"

"Stay, I see her examining the blood; she reflects; then she places her finger where you had placed yours. Ah! the lion's eye gives way—a spring acts—the chimney board flies open!"

"Oh! imprudent, wretched fool that I am! I have betrayed myself!"

Andrée was silent.

"And she leaves the room?" asked Balsamo; "she escapes?"

"Oh! you must forgive the poor woman—she was very miserable."

"Where is she? whither does she fly? Follow her, Andrée—it is my will."

"She stops for a moment in the chamber of furs and armour: a cupboard is open; a casket, usually locked in this cupboard, is upon the table; she recognises the box; she takes it."

"What does the box contain?"

"Your papers, I think."

"Describe it."

"It is covered with blue velvet, and studded with brass nails; has clasps of silver, and a golden lock."

"Oh!" exclaimed Balsamo, stamping with anger; "it is she, then, who has taken the casket!"

"Yes. She descends the stairs leading into the anteroom, opens the door, draws back the chain of the street door, and goes out."

"Is it late?"

"It must be late, for it is dark."

"So much the better; she must have fled shortly before my return, and I shall perhaps have time to overtake her. Follow her, Andrée, follow her!"

"Once outside the house, she runs as if she were mad! she reaches the boulevard—she hastens on without pausing."

"In which direction?"

"Towards the Bastille."

"You see her yet?"

"Yes; she looks like a mad-woman; she jostles against the passers-by; she stops—she endeavours to discover where she is; she inquires."

"What does she say? Listen, Andrée, listen; in heaven's name do not lose a syllable! You said she inquired?"

"Yes, from a man dressed in black."

"What does she ask?"

"She wishes to know the address of the lieutenant of police."

"Oh! then it was not a vain threat. Does the person give it her?"

"Yes."

"What does she do?"

"She retraces her steps and turns down a winding street. She crosses a large square."

"The Place Royale—it is the direct way. Can you read her intention?"

"Follow her quickly!—hasten!—she goes to betray you! If she arrives before you and sees M. de Sartines, you are lost!"

Balsamo uttered a terrible cry, plunged into the thicket, rushed through a little door, which a shadowy apparition opened and closed after him, and leaped with one bound on his faithful Djerid, who was pawing the ground at the little gate. Urged on at once by voice and spur, he darted like a

arrow towards Paris, and soon nothing was heard but the clattering of his hoofs on the paved causeway.

As for Andrée, she remained standing there, cold, mute, and pale. Then, as if Balsamo had borne away with him life and strength, she tottered, drooped, and fell. Balsamo, in his eagerness to follow Lorenza, had forgotten to awaken her.

Andrée did not sink, as we have said, all at once, but gradually, in the manner we will attempt to describe.

Alone, abandoned, overpowered with that deathlike coldness which succeeds any violent nervous shock, Andrée began to tremble and totter like one suffering from the commencement of an epileptic fit.

Gilbert had never moved—rigid, immovable, leaning forward and devouring her with his gaze. But, as it may readily be imagined, Gilbert, entirely ignorant of magnetic phenomena, dreamed neither of sleep nor of suffered violence. He had heard nothing, or almost nothing, of her dialogue with Balsamo. But for the second time, at Trianon as at Taverney, Andrée had appeared to obey the summons of this man, who had acquired such a strange and terrible power over her. To Gilbert, therefore, everything resolved itself in this : Mademoiselle Andrée has, if not a lover, at least a man whom she loves, and to whom she grants a rendezvous at night.

The dialogue which had taken place between Andrée and Balsamo, although sustained in a low voice, had all the appearance of a quarrel. Balsamo, excited, flying, frantic, seemed like a lover in despair ; Andrée, left alone, mute and motionless, like the fair one he had abandoned.

It was at this moment that he saw the young girl totter, wring her hands, and sink slowly to the ground. Then she uttered twice or thrice a groan so deep, that her oppressed heart seemed torn by the effort. She endeavoured, or rather nature endeavoured, to throw back the overpowering mass of fluid which, during the magnetic sleep, had endowed her with that double sight which we have seen, in the preceding pages, produce such strange phenomena.

But nature was overpowered ; Andrée could not succeed in throwing off the remains of that mysterious will which Balsamo had forgotten to withdraw. She could not loose the marvellous, inexplicable ties which had bound her hand and foot ; and by dint of struggling, she fell into those convulsions which in the olden time the Pythoness suffered upon her tripod, before the crowd of religious questioners who swarmed around the peristyle of the temple. Andrée lost her equilibrium, and uttering a heart-rending groan, fell to the ground as if she had been struck by the flash which at that moment furrowed the vault of heaven.

But she had not yet touched the earth when Gilbert, strong and agile as a panther, darted towards her, seized her in his arms, and without being conscious that he carried a burden, bore her back into the chamber which she had left to obey Balsamo's summons, and in which the candle was yet burning beside the disarranged couch.

Gilbert found all the doors open as Andrée had left them. As he entered, he stumbled against the sofa, and placed on it the cold and inanimate form of the young girl. The most pressing matter was to recall this beautiful statue to life. He looked round for the carafe, in order to sprinkle some drops of water in Andrée's face.

But just as his trembling hand was stretched forth to grasp the thin neck of the crystal ewer, it seemed to him that a firm but light step sounded on the stairs leading to Andrée's chamber.

It could not be Nicole, for Nicole had fled with M. Beausire; it could not be Balsamo, for Balsamo was spurring with lightning haste to Paris. It could therefore only be a stranger.

Gilbert, if discovered, was lost; Andrée was to him like one of those princesses of Spain, whom a subject may not touch, even to save their life.

All these ideas rushed like a whirlwind through Gilbert's mind in less time than we can relate them. He could not calculate the exact distance of the footstep, which every moment approached still nearer, for the storm which raged without dulled every other sound, but, gifted with extraordinary coolness and foresight, the young man felt that that was no place for him, and that the most important matter was to conceal himself from sight.

He hastily blew out the candle which illumined the apartment, and entered the closet which served as Nicole's sleeping-chamber. From this hiding-place he could see through the glass-door into Andrée's apartment, and also into the antechamber.

In this antechamber a night-lamp was burning upon a little console-table. Gilbert had at first thought of extinguishing it, as he had done the candle, but he had not time; the step echoed upon the corridor, a repressed breathing was heard, the figure of a man appeared upon the threshold, glided timidly into the antechamber, and closed the door.

Gilbert had only time to hasten into Nicole's closet, and to draw the glass-door after him.

He held his breath, pressed his face against the stained glass panes, and listened eagerly.

The storm still howled wildly outside, large rain-drops beat against the windows of Andrée's apartment and those of the corridor, where a casement, accidentally left open, creaked upon its hinges, and every now and then, dashed back by the wind which rushed into the corridor, struck noisily against its frame.

But the war of the elements, terrible as it was, produced no effect on Gilbert. His whole soul was concentrated in his gaze, which was riveted upon this man. He crossed the antechamber, passed not two paces distant from Gilbert, and unhesitatingly entered the principal apartment.

As he advanced, he jostled with his arm against the candle upon the table. The candle fell, and Gilbert heard the crystal socket break in falling on the marble table. Then the man called twice in a subdued voice:

"Nicole! Nicole!"

"What! Nicole!" thought Gilbert in his hiding-place. "Why does this man call Nicole instead of Andrée?"

But as no voice replied to his, the man lifted the candle from the floor, and proceeded on tiptoe to light it at the night-lamp in the antechamber. It was then that Gilbert riveted his whole attention upon this strange nocturnal visitor; he gazed as if his vision could have pierced the wall. All at once he trembled, and, even in his hiding-place, recoiled a step backwards.

By the light of these two flames combined, Gilbert, trembling and half dead with affright, recognised, in this man who held the candle in his hands—the king!

Then all was explained: Nicole's flight, the money she had given Beausire, the door left open, the interviews between Richelieu and Taverney, and the whole of that dark and mysterious intrigue of which the young girl was the centre.

He would have cried out, but fear—that unreflecting, capricious, irresistible feeling—the fear he felt for this man, whose name had still a charm—the King of France—tied Gilbert's tongue. He slipped stealthily from the closet, gained the antechamber, and fled as if the avenger were behind him.

In the meantime Louis entered the room, candle in hand, and perceived Andrée reclining on the couch, wrapped in a long muslin dressing-gown, her head drooping on her shoulder.

He murmured some words in a caressing voice, and putting his light upon the table, he knelt beside the young girl, and kissed her hand. It was icy cold. Alarmed, he started up, hastily put aside her dressing-gown, and placed his trembling hand upon her heart. Her heart was cold and motionless!

Just then, a fearful peal of thunder made every article of furniture in the room shake, even to the couch before which Louis was standing. A livid and sulphureous flash of lightning threw so dazzling a light over Andrée's countenance, that Louis, alarmed at her paleness, her motionless attitude, and her silence, started back, murmuring:

"This girl is surely dead!"

At the same instant, the idea of having a corpse before him sent an icy chill through the king's veins. He seized the candle, held it close to Andrée's face, and hastily examined her features by the light of the trembling flame. Beholding her livid lips, her swollen and discoloured eyes, her dishevelled hair, her chest which no breath stirred, he uttered a cry, let the light fall, staggered back, and reeled like a drunken man into the anteroom, against the walls of which he stumbled in his alarm.

Then his hasty step sounded upon the stairs, then on the gravel walks of the garden, and was soon lost in the howling storm which raged through the long alleys and shady groves of Trianon.

CHAPTER CXIX.

THE WILL.

We have seen Balsamo depart. Djerid bore him on with the speed of lightning, whilst the rider, pale with terror and impatience, bent forward over the flowing mane, breathing with half-opened lips the air which the crest of the noble steed cleft as the rapid prow of the vessel cuts the waves.

Behind him, houses and trees disappeared like fantastic visions. He scarcely perceived, as he passed, the clumsy wagon groaning on its axletree, while its five huge horses started with affright at the approach of this living meteor, which they could not imagine to belong to the same race as themselves.

Balsamo proceeded at this rate for a league, with whirling brain, sparkling eyes and panting breath. Horse and rider had traversed Versailles in a few seconds. The startled inhabitants who happened to be in the

streets had seen a long train of sparks flash past them—nothing more. A second league was passed in like manner. Djerid had accomplished the distance in little more than a quarter of an hour, and yet this quarter of an hour had seemed to his rider a century. All at once a thought darted through his brain. He pulled up suddenly, throwing the noble courser back upon his haunches, while his fore-feet ploughed the ground.

Horse and rider breathed for a moment. Drawing a long breath Balsamo raised his head. Then, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, while his nostrils dilated in the breeze of night, he murmured:

"Oh! madman that you are, neither the rapidity of your steed nor the ardour of your desire will ever equal the instantaneous effect of thought or the rapidity of the electric flash, and yet it is that which you require to avert the danger impending over you! You require the rapid effect, the instantaneous, the all-powerful shock, which will paralyse the feet whose activity you fear, the tongue whose speech destroys you. You require, at this distance, the victorious sleep which restores to you the possession of the slave who has broken her chain. Oh! if she should ever again be in my power!"

And Balsamo ground his teeth with a despairing gesture.

"Oh! you do well to wish, Balsamo, you do well to fly!" exclaimed he. "Lorenza has already arrived, she is about to speak—she has perhaps already spoken. Oh! wretched woman! no punishment can be terrible enough for you.

"Let me try," continued Balsamo, frowning, his eyes fixed, and his chin resting on his hand, "let me try. Either science is a dream or a fact—it is either impotent or powerful; let me try. 'Lorenza! Lorenza!' it is my will that you sleep, wheresoever you may be, Lorenza, sleep—sleep—it is my will! I reckon upon your obedience!

"Oh! no, no!" murmured he, despairingly; "no, I utter a falsehood—I do not believe—I dare not reckon upon it—and yet the will is all. Oh! I will it with my whole soul, with all the strength of my being. Cleave the air, my potent will; traverse all the current of opposing or indifferent wills; pass through walls in thy course like a bullet from a gun; find her wherever she is; go—strike—destroy! Lorenza! Lorenza! it is my will that you sleep!—be dumb at my command."

And for some moments he concentrated his thoughts upon *this* act, imprinting it on his brain as if to lend it more speed in its flight towards Paris. Then after this mysterious operation—to which doubtless all the divine atoms animated by God, the master and lord of all things, assisted—Balsamo, once more setting his teeth hard and clenching his hands, gave the reins to Djerid, but this time without using either the knee or the spurs. It seemed as if Balsamo wished to convince himself.

The noble steed paced gently onwards in obedience to the tacit permission of his master, placing his hoof gently upon the pavement with that light and noiseless step peculiar to his race. During this brief interval, which to a superficial observer would have seemed entirely lost, Balsamo was arranging a complete plan of defence. He concluded it as Djerid entered the streets of Sèvres. Arrived opposite the park-gates he stopped and looked round as if expecting some one. Almost immediately a man emerged from beneath a carriage entrance and advanced towards him.

"Is that you, Fritz?" asked Balsamo.

"Yes, master."

"Have you made inquiries?"

"Yes."
"Is Madame Dubarry in Paris or at Luciennes?"
"She is in Paris."
Balsamo raised his eyes to heaven with a triumphant look.
"How did you come?"
"On Sultan."
"Where is he?"
"In the court-yard of this inn."
"Ready saddled?"
"Quite ready."
"Very well, be prepared to follow me."

Fritz hastened to bring out Sultan. He was a horse of that strong, willing German race, who grumble a little at forced marches, but who, nevertheless, go as long as they have breath in their lungs, or while there is a spur at their master's heel. Fritz returned to Balsamo, who was writing by the light of a street lantern.

"Return to Paris," said he, "and manage by some means to give this note to Madame Dubarry in person. You have half an hour for this purpose. After which you will return to the Rue Saint Claude, where you will wait for Madame Lorenza, who cannot fail to return soon. You will let her pass without any observation and without offering any opposition. Go, and remember, above all, that in half an hour your commission must be executed."

"It is well," said Fritz, "it shall be done."

As he gave this confident reply to Balsamo, he attacked Sultan with whip and spur, and the good steed started off, astonished at this unusual aggression, and neighing piteously.

Balsamo by degrees resumed his composure, and took the road to Paris, which he entered three quarters of an hour afterwards, his features almost unruffled and his look calm but pensive.

Balsamo was right. However swift Djerid, the neighing son of the desert, might be, his speed was powerless, and thought alone could hope to overtake Lorenza in her flight from prison.

From the Rue Saint Claude she had gained the boulevard, and turning to the right, she soon saw the walls of the Bastille rise before her. But Lorenza, constantly a prisoner, was entirely ignorant of Paris. Moreover, her first aim was to escape from that accursed house in which she saw only a dungeon; vengeance was a secondary consideration.

She had just entered the Faubourg Saint Antoine, hastening onward with bewildered steps, when she was accosted by a young man who had been following her for some moments with astonishment.

In fact, Lorenza, an Italian girl from the neighbourhood of Rome, having almost always lived a secluded life, far from all knowledge of the fashions and customs of the age, was dressed more like an Oriental than a European lady; that is, in flowing and sumptuous robes, very unlike the charming dolls of that time, confined, like wasps, in long tight waists, rustling with silk and muslin, under which it was almost useless to seek a body, their utmost ambition being to appear immaterial.

Lorenza had only adopted, from the French costume of that period, the shoes with heels two inches high—that strange looking invention which stiffened the foot, displayed the beauty of the ankle, and which rendered it impossible for the Arethusas of that rather mythological age to fly from the pursuit of their Alpheuses.

The Alpheus who pursued our Arethusa easily overtook her, therefore.

He had seen her lovely ankles peeping from beneath her petticoats of satin and lace, her unpowdered hair, and her dark eyes sparkling with a strange fire from under a mantilla thrown over her head and neck, and he imagined he saw in Lorenza a lady disguised for a masquerade, or for a rendezvous, and proceeding on foot, for want of a coach, to some little house of the faubourg.

He approached her, therefore, and walking beside her, hat in hand:

"Good heavens! madame," said he, "you cannot go far in this costume, and with these shoes which retard your progress. Will you accept my arm until we find a coach, and allow me the honour of accompanying you to your destination?"

Lorenza turned her head abruptly, gazed with her dark expressive eyes at the man who thus made her an offer which to many ladies would have appeared an impertinent one, and, stopping:

"Yes," said she, "most willingly."

The young man gallantly offered his arm.

"Whither are we going, madame?" asked he.

"To the hotel of the lieutenant of police."

The young man started.

"To M. de Sartines?" he inquired.

"I do not know if his name be M. de Sartines or not; I wish to speak to whoever is lieutenant of police."

The young man began to reflect. A young and handsome woman wandering alone in the streets of Paris at eight o'clock in the evening, in a strange costume, holding a box under her arm, and inquiring for the hotel of the lieutenant of police, while she was going in the contrary direction, seemed suspicious.

"Ah! diable," said he, "the hotel of the lieutenant of police is not in this direction at all."

"Where is it, then?"

"In the Faubourg St. Germain."

"And how must I go to the Faubourg St. Germain?"

"This way, madame," replied the young man, calm but always polite; "and if you wish, we can take the first coach we meet——"

"Oh, yes, a coach; you are right."

The young man conducted Lorenza back to the boulevard, and having met a hackney-coach, he hailed it. The coachman answered his summons.

"Where to, madame?" asked he.

"To the hotel of M. de Sartines," said the young man.

And, with a last effort of politeness, or rather of astonishment, having opened the coach-door, he bowed to Lorenza, and, after assisting her to get in, gazed at her departing form as we do in a dream or vision.

The coachman, full of respect for the dreadful name, gave his horse the whip and drove rapidly in the direction indicated.

It was while Lorenza was thus crossing the Place Royale that Andrée in her magnetic sleep had seen and heard her, and denounced her to Balsamo. In twenty minutes Lorenza was at the door of the hotel.

"Must I wait for you, my fair lady?" asked the coachman.

"Yes," replied Lorenza, mechanically.

And stepping lightly from the coach, she disappeared beneath the portal of the splendid hotel.

CHAPTER CXX.

THE HOTEL OF M. DE SARTINES.

THE moment Lorenza entered the court-yard, she found herself surrounded by a crowd of soldiers and officers. She addressed the garde-française who stood nearest to her, and begged him to conduct her to the lieutenant of police. The guardsman handed her over to the porter, who, seeing a beautiful stranger, richly dressed, and holding a magnificent coffer under her arm, thought that the visit might prove not to be an unimportant one, and preceded her up the grand staircase to an antechamber, where every comer could, after the sagacious scrutiny of the porter, be admitted to present an explanation, an accusation, or a request, to M. de Sartines, at any hour of the day or night.

It is needless to say that the two first classes of visitors were more favourably received than the latter.

Lorenza, when questioned by the usher, only replied :

"Are you M. de Sartines?"

The usher was profoundly astonished that any one could mistake his black dress and steel chain for the embroidered coat and flowing wig of the lieutenant of police ; but as no lieutenant is ever angry at being called captain, as he marked the foreign accent of the lady, and as her firm and steady gaze was not that of a lunatic, he felt convinced that the fair visitor had something important in the coffer which she held so carefully and so securely under her arm.

But as M. de Sartines was a prudent and suspicious man, as traps had been laid for him with baits not less enticing than that of the beautiful Italian, there was good watch kept around him, and Lorenza had to undergo the investigation, the questioning, and the suspicions, of half a dozen secretaries and valets. The result of all these questions and replies was, that M. de Sartines had not yet returned, and that Lorenza must wait.

Then the young woman sunk into a moody silence, and her eyes wandered over the bare walls of the vast antechamber.

At last the ringing of a bell was heard ; a carriage rolled into the court-yard, and a second usher entered and announced to Lorenza that M. de Sartines was waiting for her.

Lorenza rose, and crossed two halls full of people with suspicious-looking faces, and dresses still more strange than her own. At last she was introduced into a large cabinet of an octagon form, lighted by a number of wax candles.

A man of from fifty to fifty-five years of age, enveloped in a dressing-gown, his head surmounted by a wig profusely powdered and curled, was seated at work before a lofty piece of furniture, the upper part of which, somewhat resembling in form a cupboard, was closed with two doors of looking-glass, in which the person seated could, without moving, see any one who entered the room, and could examine their features before they had time to compose them in harmony with his own.

The lower part of this article of furniture formed a secretaire. A

number of rosewood drawers composed the front, each of which closed by the combination of some letters of the alphabet. M. de Sartines kept in them his papers, and the ciphers which no one in his lifetime could read, since the drawers opened for him alone, and which none could have deciphered after his death, unless in some drawer, still more secret than the others, he had found the key to the cipher.

This secretaire, or rather this cupboard, contained, behind the glasses of the upper part, twelve drawers, also closed by an invisible mechanism. This piece of furniture, constructed expressly by the regent to contain his chemical or political secrets, had been given by that prince to Dubois, and left by Dubois to M. Dombreval, lieutenant of police. It was from the latter that M. de Sartines had inherited the press and the secret. However, M. de Sartines had not consented to use it until after the death of the donor, and even then he had had all the arrangements of the locks altered.

This piece of furniture had some reputation in the world, and shut too closely, people said, for M. de Sartines only to keep his wigs in it.

The grumblers, and their name was legion at this period, said that if it were possible to read through the panels of this secretaire, there would most certainly have been discovered, in one of its drawers, the famous treaty by virtue of which Louis XV. speculated in grain, through the intervention of his devoted agent, M. de Sartines.

The lieutenant of police therefore saw, reflected in the glass, the pale, serious face of Lorenza, as she advanced towards him with the coffer still beneath her arm. In the centre of the apartment the young girl stopped. Her costume, her figure, and the strangeness of her proceedings, struck the lieutenant.

"Who are you?" asked he, without turning round, but looking at her in the glass. "What do you want with me?"

"Am I in the presence of M. de Sartines, lieutenant of police?" replied Lorenza.

"Yes," replied he, abruptly.

"Who will assure me of that?"

M. de Sartines turned round.

"Will it be a proof that I am the man you seek," said he, "if I send you to prison?"

Lorenza made no reply. She merely looked around the room with that indescribable dignity peculiar to the women of Italy, and seemed to seek the chair which M. de Sartines did not offer her.

He was vanquished by this look, for Monsieur the Count d'Alby de Sartines was a remarkably well-bred man.

"Be seated," said he, sharply.

Lorenza drew a chair forward and sat down.

"Speak quickly," said the magistrate. "Come! let me know what you want."

"Sir," said Lorenza, "I come to place myself under your protection."

M. de Sartines looked at her with the sarcastic look peculiar to him.

"Ah! ah!" said he.

"Sir," continued Lorenza, "I have been carried off from my family, and have, by a false marriage, fallen into the power of a man who for the last three years has oppressed me and made my life miserable."

M. de Sartines looked with admiration upon this noble countenance, and felt touched and charmed by this voice, so soft that it seemed more like a strain of music.

"From what country do you come?" he asked.

"I am a Roman."

"What is your name?"

"Lorenza."

"Lorenza what?"

"Lorenza Feliciani."

"I do not know that family. Are you a demoiselle?"

Demoiselle at this period meant a lady of quality. In our days a lady thinks herself noble enough when she is married, and only wishes thenceforth to be called madame.

"I am a demoiselle," replied Lorenza.

"Well? What do you demand?"

"I demand justice against this man who has stolen and incarcerated me."

"That is no affair of mine," said the lieutenant of police; "are you his wife?"

"He says so, at least."

"How!—says!"

"Yes, but I do not remember anything of it, as the marriage was contracted whilst I slept."

"Peste! you sleep soundly."

"What do you say?"

"I say that it is not in my province. Apply to a procureur and commence an action; I do not like to meddle in family matters."

Upon which M. de Sartines waved his hand with a gesture which meant, "Begone!" Lorenza did not move.

"Well?" asked M. de Sartines, astonished.

"I have not done yet," said she; "and if I come to you, you must understand that it is not to complain of a trifling matter, but to revenge myself. I have told you that the women of my country revenge themselves, but never complain."

"That is another affair," said M. de Sartines; "but speak quickly, fair lady, for my time is precious."

"I told you that I came to you to ask for your protection; shall I have it?"

"Protection against whom?"

"Against the man upon whom I wish to revenge myself."

"Is he powerful?"

"More powerful than a king."

"Come, explain, my dear madame. Why should I protect you against a man who is, in your opinion, more powerful than a king, an act which is perhaps a crime? If you wish to be revenged on this man, revenge yourself. That is nothing to me; only, if you commit a crime, I shall have to arrest you, after which we shall see—that is the routine."

"No, sir," said Lorenza, "no, you will not have me arrested, for my vengeance is of the greatest utility to you, to the king, and to France. I shall revenge myself by revealing this man's secrets."

"Oh, ho! he has secrets?" said M. de Sartines, beginning to feel interested in spite of himself.

"Mighty secrets, sir."

"Of what kind?"

"Political ones."

"Mention them."

"But in that case, will you protect me?"

"What sort of protection do you require?" said the magistrate, with a cold smile; "gold, or affection?"

"I only ask permission, sir, to retire to a convent and to live there concealed and unknown. I ask that this convent may become my tomb, but that this tomb may never be violated by any one in the world."

"Ah!" said the magistrate, "that is not a very exacting demand. You shall have the convent—speak."

"Then I have your word, sir?"

"I think I said so."

"Then," said Lorenza, "take this coffer; it contains mysteries which will make you tremble for the safety of the king and his dominions."

"Then you know these mysteries?"

"Only partially—but I know they exist."

"And that they are important?"

"That they are terrible."

"Political secrets, you say?"

"Have you never heard that there existed a secret society?"

"Ah! the freemasons?"

"The invisibles."

"Yes, but I do not believe it."

"When you have opened this coffer you will believe."

"Ah!" said M. de Sartines, eagerly, "let me see."

And he took the coffer from Lorenza's hands. But suddenly, after a moment's reflection, he placed it upon the desk.

"No," said he, with an air of suspicion; "open the coffer yourself."

"But I have not the key."

"How!—you have not the key? You bring me a coffer which contains the safety of a kingdom, and you forget the key?"

"Is it so very difficult, then, to open a lock?"

"No, not when one knows it." Then, after a moment's pause, he added: "We have in this place keys for all kinds of locks; you shall have a bunch" (and he looked fixedly at Lorenza), "and you shall open it yourself."

"Give it me," said Lorenza, without the slightest hesitation.

M. de Sartines held out a bunch of little keys of all kinds to the young girl. She took them; M. de Sartines touched her hand—it was cold as marble.

"But why," said he, "did you not bring the key of the coffer?"

"Because the master of the coffer never lets it out of his possession."

"And who is the master of the coffer—this man who is more powerful than a king?"

"What he is, no one can say. The Almighty alone knows how long he has lived; the deeds he accomplishes none see but God."

"But his name—his name?"

"I have known him change it ten times."

"Well, that by which you generally address him?"

"Acharat."

"And he lives——"

"Rue Saint——"

Suddenly Lorenza started, shuddered, and let the coffer, which she held in the one hand, and the keys which she held in the other, fall to the ground. She made an effort to reply, her lips were distorted convulsively; she raised her hands to her throat, as if the words she was about to utter had suffocated her; then, tossing her trembling arms aloft, she fell her

whole length upon the carpet of the study, unable to utter a single word.

"Poor girl!" murmured M. de Sartines, "what the deuce is the matter with her? She is really very pretty. Ah! there is some jealousy at work in this project of revenge."

He rang the bell hastily, and in the meantime raised the young girl in his arms, who, with staring eyes and motionless lips, seemed already dead, and disconnected with this lower world. Two valets entered.

"Carry this young lady carefully into the adjoining apartment," said he; "endeavour to revive her, but above all use no violence. Go."

The valets obeyed, and carried Lorenza out.

CHAPTER CXXI.

THE COFFER.

WHEN he was alone, M. de Sartines turned the coffer round and round with the air of a man who can appreciate the value of a discovery. Then he stretched out his hands and picked up the bundle of keys which had fallen from Lorenza's hands.

He tried them all; none would fit.

He took several similar bunches from his drawer.

These bunches contained keys of all dimensions; keys of all sorts of articles, coffers included: common keys, and microscopic keys. M. de Sartines might be said to possess a pattern of every key known.

He tried twenty, fifty, a hundred: not one would even turn round. The magistrate concluded, therefore, that the lock was only a feigned one, and that consequently his keys were only counterfeit keys.

He then took a small chisel and a little hammer from the same drawer, and with his white hand, buried in an ample frill of Mechlin lace, he burst open the lock, the faithful guardian of the coffer.

A bundle of papers appeared, instead of the destructive machine he had feared to find there, or instead of poisons which should diffuse a fatal odour around, and deprive France of its most useful magistrate.

The first words which met the magistrate's eye were the following, written in a handwriting which was evidently feigned.

"Master, it is time to abandon the name of Balsamo."

There was no signature, but merely the three letters:—L.P.D.

"Ha!" said he, twitching the curls of his wig, "if I do not know the writing, I think I know the name. Balsamo—let me see—I must search the Bs."

He opened one of his twenty-four drawers, and took from it a list, arranged in alphabetical order, written in a fine handwriting full of abbreviations, and containing three or four hundred names, preceded, followed, and accompanied by flaming notes.

"Oh! ho!" said he, "there is a long article on this Balsamo."

And he read the whole page with unequivocal signs of dissatisfaction.

Then he replaced the list in the drawer, and continued the examination of the coffer.

He had not proceeded far before his brow assumed a darker hue, and soon he came to a note full of names and ciphers.

This paper seemed important; it was much worn at the edges, and filled with pencil-marks. M. de Sartines rang the bell; a servant appeared.

"The assistance of the chancery clerk," said he, "immediately. Let him come through the reception-rooms from the office to save time."

The valet retired. Two minutes afterwards, a clerk with a pen in his hand, his hat under one arm, a large register under the other, and wearing sleeves of black serge over his coat sleeves, appeared on the threshold of the study. M. de Sartines perceived his entrance in the mirror before him, and handed him the paper over his shoulder.

"Decipher this," said he.

"Yes, my lord," replied the clerk.

This decipherer of riddles was a little thin man, with pinched lips, eyebrows contracted by study, pale features, and head pointed both at top and bottom, a narrow chin, a receding forehead, projecting cheek-bones, hollow and dull eyes, which often sparkled with intelligence.

M. de Sartines called him La Fouine.

"Sit down," said the magistrate to him, on seeing him rather embarrassed by his note-book, his code of ciphers, his paper and his pen.

La Fouine modestly took his seat upon the corner of a stool, approached his knees together, and began to write upon them, turning over his dictionary and searching his memory, with an impassible countenance. In five minutes, he had written:

§

"An order to assemble three thousand brothers in Paris.

§

"An order to form three circles and six lodges.

§

"An order to form a guard for the Grand Copht, and to contrive four dwellings for him, one in a royal household.

§

"An order to place five hundred thousand francs at his disposal for a police.

§

"An order to enrol the flower of literature and philosophy moving in the first Parisian circles.

§

"An order to hire or to gain over the magistracy, and particularly to make sure of the lieutenant of police, by corruption, violence, or cunning."

Here La Fouine stopped for a moment, not that the poor man was reflecting—he took care not to do that, it would have been a crime—but because his page was filled, and the ink yet wet, so he was obliged to wait for its drying before he could proceed.

M. de Sartines, becoming impatient, snatched the paper from his hands and read it.

At the last paragraph, such an expression of fear was painted on his face, that he turned a deeper pale at seeing himself change colour in the mirror of his cupboard.

He did not return the paper to his clerk, but handed him a fresh sheet. The clerk once more commenced to write in proportion as he deciphered, which he did with a facility terrifying for all writers in cypher.

This time M. de Sartines read over his shoulder:

§

"To drop the name of Balsamo, which is already too well known in Paris, and to take that of the Count de Fe——"

A large blot of ink concealed the rest of the word.

While M. de Sartines was endeavouring to make out the last syllable which would complete the name, a bell was rung outside, and a valet entering, announced:

"The Count de Fenix."

M. de Sartines uttered a cry, and at the risk of demolishing the harmonious edifice of his wig, he clasped his hands above his head, and hastened to dismiss his clerk by a secret door.

Then, resuming his place before the desk, he said to the valet:

"Introduce him."

A few seconds afterwards, M. de Sartines perceived in his glass the marked profile of the count, which he had already seen at court, on the day of Madame Dubarry's presentation.

Balsamo entered without any hesitation whatever.

M. de Sartines rose, bowed coldly to the count, and crossing one leg over the other, he seated himself ceremoniously in his arm-chair.

At the first glance the magistrate had divined the cause and the aim of this visit.

At the first glance also Balsamo had perceived the opened box, half emptied upon M. de Sartines' desk. His look, however hasty, at the coffer, did not escape the lieutenant of police.

"To what chance do I owe the honour of your presence, my lord count?" asked M. de Sartines.

"Sir," replied Balsamo, with a most affable smile, "I have had the honour of being presented to all the sovereigns, ministers, and ambassadors of Europe, but I have not found any one to present me to you; I have therefore come to introduce myself."

"In truth, sir," replied the lieutenant of police, "you arrive most opportunely, for I feel convinced that had you not come of yourself, I should have had the honour of sending for you."

"Ah! indeed!" said Balsamo. "What a coincidence!"

M. de Sartines inclined his head with a sarcastic smile.

"Shall I be so fortunate as to be of any use to you?" asked Balsamo.

And these words were uttered without a shadow of emotion or of uneasiness clouding his smiling features.

"You have travelled much, my lord count?" asked the lieutenant of police.

"A great deal, sir."

"Ah!"

"You wish for some geographical information, perhaps? A man of your capacity does not confine his observations to France alone—he surveys Europe—the world."

"Geographical is not exactly the word, count. Moral would be more correct."

"Have no scruples, I beg; one is as welcome as the other. I am wholly at your service."

"Well, count, picture to yourself that I am in search of a most dangerous man—a man who, on my word, is a complete atheist."

"Oh!"

"A conspirator."

Oh!"

"A forger."

"Oh!"

"A debauchee, a false coiner, a quack, a charlatan, the chief of a society—a man whose history I have in my books, in this box that you see here—everywhere, indeed."

"Ah! yes, I comprehend," said Balsamo; "you have the history but not the man."

"No."

"Diable! The latter seems to me the most important point."

"Of course; but you shall see we are not far from having him. Certainly Proteus had not more forms, nor Jupiter more names, than this mysterious traveller. Acharat in Egypt—Balsamo in Italy—Somini in Sardinia—the Marquis Danna in Malta—the Marquis Pellegrini in Corsica—and lastly, the Count de——?"

"Count de——?" added Balsamo.

"The last name I could not decipher perfectly, sir. But I am sure you will be able to assist me, will you not? For there is no doubt you must have met this man during your travels in each of the countries I have just now named."

"Enlighten me a little, I intreat," said Balsamo, quietly.

"Ah! I understand: you wish for a description of his person, do you not, count?"

"Yes, sir, if you please."

"Well!" said M. de Sartines, fixing a glance which he intended to be inquisitorial upon Balsamo, "he is a man of your age, of your size, of your figure. He is sometimes a great lord, scattering money on all sides—sometimes a charlatan, searching into the secrets of nature—sometimes a gloomy member of some mysterious brotherhood which meets by night, and swears 'Death to kings and the overthrow of all thrones.'"

"Oh!" said Balsamo, "that is very vague."

"How, vague?"

"If you knew how many men I have seen who resemble this description."

"Indeed!"

"Of course; and you must be a little more precise if you wish me to assist you. In the first place, do you know in which country he prefers to live?"

"He dwells in all."

"But at present, for instance?"

"At present he is in France."

"And what is his errand in France?"

"He directs an immense conspiracy."

"Ah! that is indeed some clue; and if you know what conspiracy he directs, you probably hold the thread by which to catch your man."

"I am just of your opinion."

"Well! if you think so, why in that case do you ask my advice? It is useless."

"Ah! but I am not yet decided."

"On what point?"

"Whether I shall arrest him or not."

"I do not understand the *not*, Mr. Lieutenant of Police, for if he conspires——"

"Yes; but if he is partially defended by some name or some title!"

"Ah! I understand. But what name?—what title? You must tell me that before I can assist you in your search, sir."

"Why, sir, I have told you that I know the name under which he conceals himself, but——"

"But do you not know the one which he openly uses—is that it?"

"Yes, otherwise——"

"Otherwise you would arrest him."

"Instantly."

"Well, my dear M. de Sartines, it is very fortunate, as you said just now, that I arrived at this moment, for I will do you the service you require."

"You?"

"Yes."

"You will tell me his name?"

"Yes."

"His public name?"

"Yes."

"Then you know him?"

"Perfectly well."

"And what is his name?" asked M. de Sartines, expecting some falsehood.

"The Count de Fenix."

"What! the name by which you were announced?"

"The same."

"Your name?"

"My name."

"Then this Acharat—this Somini—this Marquis Danna—this Marquis Pellegrini—this Joseph Balsamo—is you?"

"Yes," said Balsamo, quietly; "is myself."

It was a minute before M. de Sartines could recover from the vertigo which this frank avowal caused him.

"You see I had guessed as much," said he. "I knew you. I knew that Joseph Balsamo and the Count de Fenix were the same."

"Ah!" said Balsamo, "you are a great minister—I confess it."

"And you are most imprudent," said the magistrate, advancing towards the bell.

"Imprudent?—why?"

"Because I am going to have you arrested."

"What say you?" replied Balsamo, stepping between the magistrate and the bell. "You are going to arrest me?"

"Pardieu! what can you do to prevent me, may I ask?"

"You ask me?"

"Yes."

"My dear lieutenant of police, I will blow your brains out."

And Balsamo drew from his pocket a charming little pistol, mounted in silver gilt—which, from its appearance, might have been chased by Ben-

venuto Cellini—and calmly levelled it at the forehead of M. de Sartines, who turned pale and sunk into an arm-chair.

"There," said Balsamo, drawing another chair close to that occupied by the lieutenant of police, and sitting down; "now that we are comfortably seated, we can chat a little."

CHAPTER CXXII.

CONVERSATION.

M. DE SARTINES took a moment or two to recover from his rather severe alarm. He had seen the threatening muzzle of the pistol presented before his very eye; he had even felt the cold metal of the barrel upon his forehead. At last he recovered.

"Sir," said he; "you have an advantage over me. Knowing what sort of a man I had to deal with, I did not take the precautions usually adopted against common malefactors."

"Oh! sir," replied Balsamo, "now you are getting angry and use injurious expressions. Do you not see how unjust you are? I come to do you a service."

M. de Sartines moved uneasily.

"Yes, sir, to serve you," resumed Balsamo, "and therefore you misunderstand my intentions; you speak to me of conspirators at the very time when I come to denounce a conspiracy to you."

But Balsamo talked in vain. M. de Sartines did not at that moment pay any great attention to the words of his dangerous visitor, and the word conspiracy, which on other occasions would have been sufficient to make him bound from his seat, scarcely caused him to prick up his ears.

"Since you know so well who I am, sir, you are aware of my mission in France. Sent by his majesty the great Frederick, I am more or less secretly the ambassador of his Prussian Majesty. Now, by ambassador is understood an inquirer; in my quality of inquirer I am ignorant of nothing that happens, and a subject upon which I am particularly well informed is the monopoly of grain."

However unpretendingly Balsamo uttered these last words, they nevertheless produced more effect upon the lieutenant of police than all the others for they made him attentive. He slowly raised his head.

"What is this affair about corn?" said he, affecting as much assurance as Balsamo himself had displayed at the commencement of the interview. "Be good enough, in your turn, to instruct me, sir."

"Willingly, sir," said Balsamo. "This is the whole matter——"

"I am all attention."

"Oh! you do not need to tell me that. Some very clever speculators have persuaded his majesty the King of France that he ought to construct granaries for his people in case of scarcity. These granaries therefore have been constructed. Whilst they were doing it, they thought it as well to make them large. Nothing was spared, neither stone nor brick, and they were made very large."

"Well?"

"Well, they had then to be filled. Empty granaries were useless, therefore they were filled."

"Well! sir," said M. de Sartines, not seeing very clearly as yet what Balsamo was driving at.

"Well! you may readily conceive that to fill these very large granaries, a great quantity of grain was required. Is that not evident?"

"Yes."

"To continue, then. A large quantity of grain withdrawn from circulation is one way of starving the people; for, mark this: any amount taken from the circulation is equivalent to a failure in the production. A thousand sacks of corn more in the granary are a thousand sacks of corn less in the market-place. If you only multiply these thousand sacks by ten, the corn will rise considerably."

M. de Sartines was seized with an irritating cough. Balsamo paused, and waited quietly till the cough was gone.

"You see, then," continued he, as soon as the lieutenant of police would permit him, "you see that the speculator in these granaries is enriched by the amount of the rise in value. Is that clear to you?"

"Perfectly clear, sir," said M. de Sartines; "but, as far as I can understand, it seems that you have the presumption to denounce to me a conspiracy or a crime of which his majesty is the author?"

"Exactly," said Balsamo; "you understand me perfectly."

"That is a bold step, sir; and I confess that I am rather curious to see how his majesty will take your accusation; I fear much the result will be precisely the same that I proposed to myself on looking over the papers in this box before your arrival. Take care, sir; your destination in either case will be the Bastille."

"Ah! now you do not understand me at all."

"How so?"

"Good heavens! how incorrect an opinion you form of me, and how deeply you wrong me, sir, in taking me for a fool! What! you imagine I intend to attack the king—I, an ambassador, an inquirer! Why, that would be the work of a simpleton! Listen to the end, pray."

M. de Sartines bowed.

"The persons who have discovered this conspiracy against the French people"—(forgive me for taking up your valuable time, sir, but you will see directly that it is not lost)—"they who have discovered this conspiracy against the French people are economists—laborious and minute men, who by their careful investigation of this underhand game have discovered that the king does not play alone. They know well that his majesty keeps an exact register of the rate of corn in the different markets; they know that his majesty rubs his hands with glee when the rise has produced him eight or ten thousand crowns; but they know also that beside his majesty there stands a man whose position facilitates the sales, a man who naturally, thanks to certain functions (he is a functionary, you must know), superintends the purchases, the arrivals, the packing—a man, in short, who manages for the king. Now these economists—these microscopic observers, as I call them—will not attack the king, for of course they are not mad, but they will attack, my dear sir, the man, the functionary, the agent, who thus haggles for his majesty."

M. de Sartines endeavoured in vain to restore the equilibrium of his wig.

"Now," continued Balsamo, "I am coming to the point. Just as you,

who have a police, knew that I was the Count de Fenix, so I know that you are M. de Sartines."

"Well, what then?" said the embarrassed magistrate. "Yes, I am M. de Sartines. What a discovery!"

"Ah! but cannot you understand that this M. de Sartines is precisely the man of the price list, of the underhand dealings, of the stowing away—he who, either with or without the king's cognisance, traffics with the food of twenty-seven millions of French people, whom his office requires him to feed on the best possible terms. Now just imagine the effect of such a discovery. You are not much beloved by the people; the king is not a very considerate man: as soon as the cries of the famishing millions demand your head, the king—to avert all suspicion of connivance with you, if there is connivance, or if there is no connivance, to do justice—will cause you to be hung upon a gibbet, like Enguerrand de Marigny. Do you recollect Enguerrand?"

"Imperfectly," said M. de Sartines, turning very pale; "and it is a proof of very bad taste, I think, sir, to talk of gibbets to a man of my rank."

"Oh! if I alluded to it," replied Balsamo, "it was because I think I see poor Enguerrand still before me. I assure you he was a perfect gentleman, from Normandy, of a very ancient family and a noble descent. He was chamberlain of France, captain of the Louvre, comptroller of finance and of buildings; he was Count of Longueville, which county is more considerable than yours of Alby! Well, sir, I saw him hung upon the gallows of Montfaucon, which he had himself constructed! Thank God, it was not a crime to have said to him before the catastrophe, 'Enguerrand, my dear Enguerrand! take care—you are dipping into the finances to an extent that Charles of Valois will never pardon.' He would not listen to me, sir, and unfortunately he perished. Alas! if you knew how many prefects of police I have seen, from Pontius Pilate down to M. Bertin de Belille, Count de Bourdeilhes, Lord of Brantome, your predecessor, who first introduced the lantern and prohibited the scales."

M. de Sartines rose, and endeavoured in vain to conceal the agitation which preyed upon him.

"Well," said he, "you can accuse me if you like. Of what importance is the testimony of a man such as you, who has no influence or connections?"

"Take care, sir," said Balsamo; "frequently those who seem to have no connections are connected far and wide; and when I shall write the history of these corn speculations to my correspondent Frederick, who you know is a philosopher—when Frederick shall hasten to communicate the affair, with his comments upon it, to M. Arouet de Voltaire—when the latter, with his pen, whose reputation at least I hope you know, shall have metamorphosed it into a little comic tale in the style of 'L'homme aux quarante Ecus'—when M. d'Alembert, that excellent geometrician, shall have calculated that the corn withdrawn from the public consumption by you might have fed a hundred millions of men for two or three years—when Helvetius shall have shown that the price of this corn, converted into crowns of six livres and piled up, would touch the moon, or, into bank-notes fastened together, would reach to Saint Petersburg—when this calculation shall have inspired M. de la Harpe to write a bad drama, Diderot a family conversation, and M. Jean Jacques Rousseau, of Geneva, who has a tolerably sharp bite when he chooses, a terrible paraphrase of this conversation, with his own commentaries—when M. Caron de Beau-

marchais—may heaven preserve you from treading on his toes!—shall have written a memoir, M. Grimm a little letter, M. de Holbach a thundering attack, M. de Marmontel an amiable moral tale in which he will kill you by defending you badly—when you shall be spoken of in the Café de la Regence, the Palais Royal, at Audinet's, at the king's dancers' (kept up, as you know, by M. Nicolet)—ah! Count d'Alby, you will be in a much worse case than poor Enguerrand de Marigny (whom you would not hear me mention) when he stood under the gallows, for he asserted his innocence, and that with so much earnestness that, on my word of honour, I believed him when he told me so."

At these words, M. de Sartines, no longer paying any heed to decorum, took off his wig and wiped his bald pate, which was bathed in perspiration.

"Well," said he, "so be it! But all that will not prevent me in the least. Ruin me if you can; you have your proofs, I have mine. Keep your secret, I shall keep the coffer."

"Oh! sir," said Balsamo, "that is another error into which I am surprised that a man of your talents should fall; this coffer——"

"Well! what of it?"

"You will not keep."

"Oh!" exclaimed M. de Sartines, with a sarcastic smile, "true; I had forgotten that the Count de Fenix is a gentleman of the highway, who rifles travellers with the strong hand. I forgot your pistol, because you have replaced it in your pocket. Excuse me, my lord ambassador."

"But, good heavens! why speak of pistols, M. de Sartines? You surely do not believe that I mean to carry off the coffer by main force; that when on the stairs I may hear your bell ring, and your voice cry, 'Stop thief!' Oh, no! When I say that you will not keep this coffer, I mean that you will restore it to me willingly and without constraint."

"What! I!" exclaimed the magistrate, placing his clenched hand upon the disputed object with so much weight that he nearly broke it.

"Yes, you."

"Oh! very well, sir, mock away; but as to taking this coffer, I tell you you shall only have it with my life. And have I not risked my life a thousand times? Do I not owe it, to the last drop, to the service of his majesty? Kill me—you can do so! but the noise will summon my avengers, and I shall have voice enough left to convict you of all your crimes. Ah! give you back this coffer!" added he, with a bitter smile, "all hell should not wrest it from me!"

"And, therefore, I shall not employ the intervention of the subterranean powers. I shall be satisfied with that of the person who is just now knocking at the gate of your court-yard."

And in fact, just at that moment, three blows struck with an air of command were heard outside.

"And whose carriage," continued Balsamo, "is just now entering the court."

"It seems, then, that it is some friend of yours who is coming to honour me with a visit?"

"As you say—a friend of mine."

"And I shall hand this coffer to him."

"Yes, my dear M. de Sartines, you will give it to him."

The lieutenant of police had not finished his gesture of lofty disdain, when a valet opened the door hastily, and announced that Madame Dubarry wished for an interview.

M. de Sartines started, and looked in stupefied amazement at Balsamo, who required all his self-command to avoid laughing in the face of the honourable magistrate.

Close behind the valet appeared a lady who seemed to have no need of permission to enter. It was the beautiful countess, whose flowing and perfumed skirts gently rustled as they brushed past the doorway of the cabinet.

"You, madame! you!" exclaimed M. de Sartines, who, in the instinct of terror, had seized the open coffer in both hands, and clasped it to his breast.

"Good-day, Sartines," said the countess, with her gayest smile; then turning to Balsamo, "good day, dear count," added she, and she gave her hand to the latter, who familiarly bent over the white fingers, and pressed his lips where the royal lips had so often rested.

In this movement Balsamo managed to whisper a few words aside to the countess, which Sartines could not hear.

"Ah! precisely," exclaimed the countess, "there is my coffer."

"Your coffer!" stammered M. de Sartines.

"Of course, my coffer—oh! you have opened it; I see—you do not observe much ceremony!"

"But, madame——"

"Oh! it is delightful! The idea occurred to me at once that some one had stolen this coffer, and then I said to myself, 'I must go to Sartines, he will find it for me.' You did not wait till I asked you; you found it beforehand—a thousand thanks!"

"And as you see," said Balsamo, "monsieur has even opened it."

"Yes, really!—who could have thought it! It is odious conduct of you, Sartines!"

"Madame, notwithstanding all the respect I have for you," said the lieutenant of police, "I fear that you are imposed upon."

"Imposed, sir!" said Balsamo; "do you perchance mean that word for me?"

"I know what I know," replied M. de Sartines.

"And I know nothing," whispered Madame Dubarry in a low voice to Balsamo. "Come, tell me what is the matter, my dear count! You have claimed the fulfilment of the promise I made you, to grant the first favour you should ask. I keep my word like a woman of honour, and here I am. Tell me what must I do for you?"

"Madame," replied Balsamo aloud, "you confided the care of this coffer and everything it contains to me, a few days ago."

"Of course," answered Madame Dubarry, replying by a look to the count's appealing glance.

"Of course!" exclaimed M. de Sartines; "you say of course, madame?"

"Yes; madame pronounced the words loud enough for you to hear them, I should think."

"A box which contains perhaps ten conspiracies!"

"Ah! M. de Sartines, you are aware that that word is rather an unfortunate one for you; do not repeat it. Madame asks for her box again; give it her—that is all."

"Do you ask me for it, madame?" said M. de Sartines, trembling with anger.

"Yes, my dear magistrate."

"But learn, at least——"

Balsamo looked at the countess.

"You can tell me nothing I do not know," said Madame Dubarry; "give me the coffer; you may believe I did not come for nothing!"

"But in the name of heaven, madame!—in the name of his majesty's safety!——"

Balsamo made an impatient gesture.

"The coffer, sir!" said the countess abruptly; "the coffer—yes or no! Reflect well before you refuse."

"As you please, madame!" said M. de Sartines humbly.

And he handed the coffer, in which Balsamo had already replaced all the papers scattered over the desk, to the countess.

Madame Dubarry turned towards the latter with a charming smile.

"Count," said she, "will you carry this coffer to my carriage for me, and give me your hand through all these ante-chambers, thronged with villainous-looking faces which I do not like to confront alone. Thanks, Sartines."

And Balsamo was already advancing towards the door with his protectress, when he saw M. de Sartines moving towards the bell.

"Countess," said Balsamo, stopping his enemy with a look, "be good enough to tell M. de Sartines, who is quite enraged with me for having claimed this box—be good enough to tell him how much grieved you would be if any misfortune were to happen to me through the agency of the lieutenant of police, and how displeased you would be with him."

The countess smiled on Balsamo.

"You hear what the count says, my dear Sartines?—well! it is the simple truth. The count is an excellent friend of mine, and I should be dreadfully angry with you if you displeased him in any way whatsoever. Adieu, Sartines!" And placing her hand in Balsamo's, who carried the coffer, Madame Dubarry left the study of the lieutenant of police.

M. de Sartines saw them depart without displaying that fury which Balsamo expected him to manifest.

"Go!" said the conquered magistrate; "go—you have the box, but I have the woman!"

And to compensate himself for his disappointment, he rang loud enough to break all the bells in the house.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

SARTINES BEGINS TO THINK BALSAMO A SORCERER.

At the violent ringing of M. de Sartines' bell, an usher entered.

"Well!" asked the magistrate; "this woman?"

"What woman, my lord?"

"The woman who fainted here just now, and whom I confided to your care."

"My lord, she is quite well," replied the usher.

"Very good; bring her to me."

"Where shall I find her, my lord?"

"What do you mean? In that room, of course."
"But she is not there, my lord."
"Not there! Then where is she?"
"I do not know."
"She is gone?"
"Yes."
"Alone?"
"Yes."
"But she could not stand."
"My lord, it is true that for some moments she remained in a swoon; but five minutes after the Count de Fenix entered my lord's study, she awoke from this strange fit, which neither essences nor salts affected in the least. Then she opened her eyes, rose, and breathed, seemingly with an air of satisfaction."
"Well, what then?"
"She proceeded towards the door; and, as my lord had not ordered that she should be detained, she was allowed to depart."
"Gone!" cried M. de Sartines. "Ah! wretch that you are! I shall send you all to rot at Bicetre! Quick, quick! send me my head-clerk!"
The usher retired hastily to obey the order he had received.
"The wretch is a sorcerer!" muttered the unfortunate magistrate. "I am lieutenant of police to the king, but he is lieutenant of police to the devil!"
The reader has, no doubt, understood what M. de Sartines could not explain to himself. Immediately after the incident of the pistol, and while the lieutenant of police was endeavouring to regain his equanimity, Balsamo, profiting by the momentary respite, had turned successively to the four cardinal points, quite sure of finding Lorenza in one of them, and had ordered her to rise, to go out, and to return by the way she had come, to the Rue Saint Claude.
The moment this wish had been formed in Balsamo's mind, a magnetic current was established between him and the young woman, and the latter, obeying the order she had received by intuition, rose and retired, without any one opposing her departure.
M. de Sartines that same evening took to his bed, and caused himself to be bled. The revulsion had been too strong for him to bear with impunity; and the doctor assured him that a quarter of an hour more would have brought on an attack of apoplexy.
Meanwhile, Balsamo had accompanied the countess to her carriage, and had attempted to take his leave of her; but she was not a woman to let him go thus, without knowing, or at least without endeavouring to discover, the solution of the strange event which had taken place before her. She begged the count to enter her carriage. The count obeyed, and a groom led Djerid behind.
"You see now, count," said she, "whether I am true or not, and whether, when I have called a man my friend, I spoke with the lips merely, or my heart. I was just setting out for Luciennes, where the king had said he would pay me a visit to-morrow morning; but your letter arrived, and I left everything for you. Many would have been frightened at the words conspiracies and conspirators which M. de Sartines threw in your teeth: but I looked at your countenance before I acted, and did as you wished me."
"Madame," replied Balsamo, "you have amply repaid the slight service I was able to render you; but with me nothing is lost—you will find that

I can be grateful. Do not imagine, however, that I am a criminal—a conspirator, as M. de Sartines said. That worthy magistrate had received, from some person who betrayed me, this coffer, containing some chemical and hermetical secrets—which I shall share with you, that you may preserve your immortal, your splendid beauty, and your dazzling youth. Now, seeing the ciphers of my receipt, this excellent M. de Sartines called the chancery clerk to assist him, who, in order not to be found wanting, interpreted them after his own fashion. I think I have already told you, madame, that the profession is not yet entirely freed from the dangers which were attendant on it in the middle ages. Only young and intelligent minds like yours favour it. In short, madame, you have saved me from a great embarrassment; I thank you for it, and shall prove my gratitude."

"But what would he have done with you if I had not come to your assistance?"

"To annoy King Frederick, whom his majesty hates, he would have imprisoned me in Vincennes or the Bastille. I should have escaped from it, I know—thanks to my receipt for melting stone with a breath—but I should have lost my coffer, which contains, as I have had the honour of telling you, many curious and invaluable secrets, wrested by a lucky chance from eternal darkness."

"Ah, count! you at once delight and reassure me. Then you promise me a philtre to make me young again?"

"Yes."

"And when will you give it me?"

"Oh! you need be in no hurry. You may ask for it twenty years hence, beautiful countess. In the meantime, I think you do not wish to become quite a child again."

"You are, in truth, a charming man. One question more and I will let you go, for you seem in haste."

"Speak, countess."

"You said that some one had betrayed you. Is it a man or a woman?"

"A woman."

"Ah! ah! count! love affairs."

"Alas! yes; prompted by an almost frantic jealousy, which has produced the pleasant effect you have seen. It is a woman who, not daring to stab me with a knife, because she knows I cannot be killed, wants to imprison and ruin me."

"What! ruin you?"

"She endeavoured to do so, at least."

"Count, I will stop here," said the countess, laughing. "Is it the liquid silver which courses through your veins that gives you that immortality which makes people betray you instead of killing you? Shall I set you down here, or drive you to your own house? Come, choose!"

"No, madame, I cannot allow you to inconvenience yourself on my account. I have my horse, Djerid."

"Ah! that wonderful animal which, it is said, outstrips the wind?"

"He seems to please you, madame."

"He is, in truth, a magnificent steed."

"Allow me to offer him to you, on the condition that you alone ride him."

"Oh! no, thank you; I do not ride on horseback; or, at least, I am a very timid horsewoman. I am as much obliged to you, however, as if I accepted your offer. Adieu! my dear count; do not forget my philtre, In ten years."

"I said twenty."

"Count, you know the proverb; 'a bird in the hand——' and if you could even give it me in five years, there is no knowing what may happen."

"Whenever you please, countess; are you not aware that I am entirely at your command?"

"Only one word more, count."

"I am all attention, madame."

"It proves that I have great confidence in you to speak of it."

Balsamo, who had already alighted from the carriage, suppressed his impatience, and approached the countess.

"It is reported everywhere," continued Madame Dubarry, "that the king is rather taken with this little Taverney."

"Ah! madame," said Balsamo, "is it possible?"

"A very great partiality, it is said. You must tell me if it is true. Count, do not deceive me; I beseech you to treat me as a friend. Tell me the truth, count."

"Madame," replied Balsamo, "I will do more; I will promise you that Mademoiselle Andrée shall never be anything to the king."

"And why not?" cried Madame Dubarry.

"Because I will it so," said Balsamo.

"Oh!" said Madame Dubarry, incredulously.

"You doubt."

"Is it not allowed?"

"Never doubt the truths of science, madame. You have believed me when I said yes; believe me when I say no."

"But, in short, have you the means——?"

"Well?"

"Means capable of annihilating the king's will, or conquering his whims?"

Balsamo smiled.

"I create sympathies," said he.

"Yes, I know that."

"You believe it, even."

"I believe it."

"Well, I can create aversions also, and, if needful, impossibilities. Therefore, countess, make your mind easy—I am on the watch."

Balsamo uttered all these fragments of sentences with an absence of mind which Madame Dubarry would not have taken as she did for inspiration, had she known the feverish anxiety which Balsamo felt to be with Lorenza as quickly as possible.

"Well, count," said she, "assuredly you are not only my prophet of happiness, but also my guardian angel. Count, mark my words: defend me and I will defend you. Alliance! union!"

"Agreed, madame," replied Balsamo, kissing the countess's hand.

Then closing the door of the carriage, which the countess had stopped upon the Champs Elysées, he mounted his horse, who neighed joyously, and was soon lost to view in the shadows of night.

"To Luciennes!" said the countess, consoled.

This time Balsamo whistled softly, and gently pressed his knees against Djerid's side, who started off at a gallop.

Five minutes afterwards he was in the vestibule of the Rue Saint Claude, looking at Fritz.

"Well?" asked he, anxiously.

"Yes, master," replied the domestic, who was accustomed to read his looks.

"She has returned?"

"She is upstairs."

"In which room?"

"In the chamber of furs."

"In what state is she?"

"Oh! very much exhausted. She ran so quickly that although I saw her coming, for I was watching for her, I had scarcely time to hasten to meet her."

"Indeed!"

"Oh! I was quite alarmed. She swept on like a tempest; rushed upstairs without taking breath; and when she entered the room, she fell upon the large black lion's skin. You will find her there."

Balsamo hastily ascended, and found Lorenza where Fritz had said. She was struggling in vain against the first convulsions of a nervous crisis. The fluid had weighed upon her too long already, and forced her to violent efforts. She was in pain, and groaned deeply; it seemed as if a mountain weighed upon her breast, and that she endeavoured with both hands to remove it.

Balsamo looked at her with an eye sparkling with anger, and taking her in his arms, he carried her into her apartment, the mysterious door of which closed behind him.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE.

BALSAMO had just entered Lorenza's apartment, and was preparing to awake her and overwhelm her with all the reproaches which his gloomy anger prompted, fully determined to punish her according to the dictates of that anger, when a triple knock upon the ceiling announced that Althotas had watched for his return and wished to speak to him.

Nevertheless Balsamo waited; he was hoping either that he had been mistaken or that the signal had been accidental, when the impatient old man repeated his blows. Balsamo, therefore—fearing, no doubt, to see him descend, as he had already done before, or that Lorenza, awakened by an influence opposed to his own, might acquire the knowledge of some other particulars no less dangerous for him than his political secrets—Balsamo therefore, after having, if we may so express it, charged Lorenza with a fresh stratum of the electric fluid, left the room to rejoin Althotas.

It was high time: the trap-door was already half way from the ceiling. Althotas had left his wheeled arm-chair and was seen squatting down upon the movable part of the ceiling which rose and fell. He saw Balsamo leave Lorenza's room.

Squatting down thus, the old man was at once hideous and terrible to behold.

His white face, in those parts which still seemed as if they belonged to

a living being, was purple with the violence of his rage. His meagre and bony hands, like those of a human skeleton, trembled and shook; his hollow eyes seemed to vacillate in their deep caverns; and, in a language unknown even to his disciple, he was loading him with the most violent invectives.

Having left his arm-chair to touch the spring, he seemed to live and move only by the aid of his long arms, lean and angular as those of a spider; and issuing, as we have said, from his chamber, inaccessible to all but Balsamo, he was about to descend to the lower apartment. To induce this feeble old man, indolent as he was, to leave his arm-chair (that cleverly constructed machine which spared him all fatigue), and consent to perform one of the actions of common life—to induce him to undergo the care and fatigue of such a change in his usual habits, it must have required some ordinary excitement thus to withdraw him from the ideal life in which he existed, and plunge him into the every-day world.

Balsamo, taken as it were in the fact, seemed at first astonished, then uneasy.

"Ah!" exclaimed Althotas, "there you are, you good-for-nothing—you ingrate! There you are, coward, who desert your master!"

Balsamo called all his patience to his aid, as he invariably did when he spoke to the old man.

"But," replied he quietly, "I think, my friend, you have only just called me."

"Your friend?" exclaimed Althotas; "your friend? you vile human creature! You dare to speak the language of your equals to me! I have been a friend to you—more than a friend—a father—a father who has educated, instructed, and enriched you. But you my friend? Oh no! for you abandon me—you assassinate me!"

"Come, master, you disturb your bile; you irritate your blood; you will make yourself ill."

"Ill?—absurdity! Have I ever been ill, except when you made me a sharer, in spite of myself, in some of the miseries of your impure human kind? Ill! have you forgotten that it is I who heal others?"

"Well, master," replied Balsamo, coldly, "I am here. Let us not lose time in vain."

"Yes, I advise you to remind me of that. Time! time! which you oblige me to economise—me, for whom this element, circumscribed to all the world, should be endless, unlimited! Yes, my time flies—yes, my time is lost—my time, like the time of other people, falls minute by minute into the gulf of eternity, when for me it ought to be eternity itself!"

"Come, master," said Balsamo, with unalterable patience, lowering the trap to the ground as he spoke, placing himself upon it, and causing it to rise again to its place in the room; "come, what is it you want? You say I starve you, but are you not in your forty days of regimen?"

"Yes, yes, doubtless; the work of regeneration commenced thirty-two days ago."

"Then tell me, of what do you complain? I see two or three bottles of rain-water, the only kind you drink, still remaining."

"Of course; but do you imagine I am a silkworm, that I can complete the grand work of renovation of youth and of transformation alone? Do you imagine that, powerless as I am, I can compose alone the elixir of life? Or think you that, reclined on my side, and enervated by cooling drinks, my sole nourishment, I could have presence of mind enough, when

left to my own resources and without your assistance, to complete the minute work of my regeneration, in which, as you, ungrateful wretch, well know, I must be aided and supported by a friend?"

"I am here, master—I am here. Answer me now," said Balsamo, replacing the old man in his chair almost in spite of himself, as he would have done a hideous infant; "answer me—you have not been in want of distilled water, for, as I said before, there are three bottles still remaining. This water, as you know, was all-collected in the month of May; there are your biscuits of barley and of sesamum, and I myself administered to you the white drops you prescribed."

"Yes, but the elixir! The elixir is not made! You do not remember it, for you were not there—it was your father, your father, who was far more faithful than you are—but at the last fiftieth I had the elixir ready a month beforehand. I had my retreat on Mount Ararat. A Jew provided me with a Christian child, still at its mother's breast, for its weight in gold; I bled it according to the rule; I took the last three drops of its arterial blood, and in an hour my elixir, which only wanted this ingredient, was composed. Therefore, my first regeneration succeeded wonderfully well. My hair and teeth fell out during the convulsions which succeeded the absorption of that wondrous elixir, but they grew again—the latter badly enough, I know, because I neglected the precaution of letting the elixir flow into my throat through a golden conduit. But my hair and my nails grew again in this second youth, and I began again to live as if I were only fifteen. Now I am old again—I am bordering on the extreme limit—and, if the elixir is not ready, if it is not safely enclosed in this bottle, if I do not bestow all possible care upon this work, the science of a century will be annihilated with me, and the admirable, the sublime secret I possess will be lost for man, who, in me and through me, approaches the divinity! Oh! if I fail—if I am mistaken, if I miss it, Acharat—it will be your fault; and take care, for my anger will be terrible—terrible!"

And as he uttered these last words, a livid glare shot from his dying eyeball, and the old man fell into a brief convulsion, which ended in a violent fit of coughing.

Balsamo instantly lavished the most eager attentions on him, and the old man recovered. His complexion had become death-like instead of pale. This feeble attack had weakened his strength so much that one would have thought he was dying.

"Come, master," said Balsamo, "tell me plainly what you want."

"What I want!" said he, looking fixedly at Balsamo.

"Yes."

"What I want is this——"

"Speak; I hear you, and I will obey, if what you ask is possible."

"Possible! possible!" muttered the old man, contemptuously. "You know that everything is possible."

"Yes, with time and science."

"Science I have, and I am on the point of conquering time. My dose has succeeded. My strength has almost entirely left me. The white drops have caused the expulsion of all the remaining portion of my former nature. Youth, like the sap of the trees in May, rises under the old bark, and buds, so to speak, through the old wood. You may remark, Acharat, that the symptoms are excellent; my voice is weak, my sight is three-quarters gone; sometimes I feel my mind wander; I have become insensible to the transition from heat to cold. I must therefore hasten to finish

my elixir, in order that, on the appointed term of my second fifty years I may at once pass from a hundred to twenty. The ingredients for the elixir are all made, the conduit is ready; I want nothing but the three drops of blood I told you of."

Balsamo made a gesture of repugnance.

"Very well," said Althotas, "let us abandon the child, since it is so difficult, and since you prefer to shut yourself up the whole day with your mistress, to seeking it for me."

"You know, master, that Lorenza is not my mistress," replied Balsamo.

"Oh! oh! oh!" exclaimed Althotas; "you say that! You think to impose on me as on the mass; you would make me believe in an immaculate creature, and yet you are a man!"

"I swear to you, master, that Lorenza is as pure as an angel; I swear to you, that love, earthly felicity, domestic happiness—I have sacrificed all to my project. For I also have my regenerating work; only, instead of applying it to myself alone, I shall apply it to all the world."

"Fool! poor fool!" cried Althotas; "I verily believe he is going to speak to me of his cataclysm of fleshworms, his revolutions of ant-hills, when I speak to him of life and eternal youth!"

"Which can only be acquired at the price of a fearful crime—and besides——"

"You doubt, I see you doubt—miserable wretch!"

"No, master; but since you give up the child, tell me what do you want?"

"I must have the first unmarried woman you meet. A woman is the best—I have discovered that, on account of the affinity of the sexes. Find me that, and quickly, for I have only eight days longer."

"Very well, master, I will see—I will search."

Another lightning flash, more terrible than the first, sparkled in the old man's eyes.

"You will see! you will search!" he cried. "Oh! is that your reply? I expected it, and I don't know why I am surprised. And since when, thou worm of the earth! was the creature entitled to speak thus to its master? Ah! you see me powerless, disabled, supplicating, and you are fool enough to think me at your mercy! Yes or no, Acharat? Answer me without embarrassment or falsehood, for I can see and read your heart; for I can judge you, and shall punish you."

"Master," replied Balsamo, "take care; your anger will do you an injury."

"Answer me—answer!"

"I can only say the truth to my master; I will see if I can procure what you desire, without injuring ourselves. I will endeavour to find a man who will sell you what you want; but I will not take the crime upon myself. That is all I can say."

"You are very fastidious!" said Althotas, with a bitter smile.

"It is so, master," said Balsamo.

Althotas made so violent an effort, that with the help of his two arms resting on the arms of the chair he raised himself to his feet.

"Yes or no?" said he.

"Master, yes, if I find it; no, if I do not."

"Then you will expose me to death, wretch! you will economise three drops of the blood of an insignificant, worthless creature such as I require, and let a perfect creature such as I am fall into the eternal gulf! Listen, Acharat!" said the old man, with a smile fearful to behold, "I no longer

ask you for anything; I ask absolutely nothing. I shall wait, but if you do not obey, I must serve myself; if you desert me, I must help myself! You have heard me—have you not? Now go!"

Balsamo, without replying to this threat, prepared everything the old man might want. He placed the drinks and the food within his reach, and performed all the services a watchful servant would perform for his master, a devoted son for his father; then, absorbed by a thought very different from that which tormented Althotas, he lowered the trap to descend, without remarking that the old man followed him with a sardonic and ominous grin.

Althotas was still grinning like an evil genius when Balsamo stood before the still sleeping Lorenza.

CHAPTER CXXV.

THE STRUGGLE.

BALSAMO stood before her, his heart swelling with mournful thoughts, for the violent ones had vanished.

The scene which had just taken place between himself and Althotas had led him to reflect on the nothingness of all human affairs, and had chased anger from his heart. He remembered the practice of the Greek philosopher who repeated the entire alphabet before listening to the voice of that black divinity, the counsellor of Achilles.

After a moment of mute and cold contemplation before the couch on which Lorenza was lying:

"I am sad," said he to himself, "but resolved, and I can look my situation fair in the face. Lorenza hates me; Lorenza has threatened to betray me, and has betrayed me. My secret is no longer my own; I have given it into this woman's power, and she casts it to the winds. I am like the fox who has withdrawn from the steel-trap only the bone of his leg, but who has left behind his flesh and his skin, so that the huntsman can say on the morrow, 'The fox has been taken here; I shall know him again, living or dead.'

"And this dreadful misfortune which Althotas cannot comprehend, and which therefore I have not even mentioned to him—this misfortune which destroys all my hopes in this country—and consequently in this world, of which France is the soul, I owe to the creature sleeping before me—to this beautiful statue with her entrancing smile. To this tempting angel I owe dishonour and ruin, and shall owe to her captivity, exile, and death.

"Therefore," continued he, becoming more animated, "the sum of evil has exceeded that of good, and Lorenza is dangerous. Oh! serpent, with thy graceful folds which nevertheless strangle, with thy golden throat which is nevertheless full of venom—sleep on, for when thou awakest I shall be obliged to kill thee!"

And with a gloomy smile Balsamo slowly approached the young woman,

whose languid eyes were turned towards him as he approached, as the sunflower and volubilis open to the first rays of the rising sun.

"Oh!" said Balsamo, "and yet I must for ever close those eyes which now beam so tenderly on me, those beautiful eyes which are filled with lightning when they no longer sparkle with love."

Lorenza smiled sweetly, and, smiling, she displayed the double row of her pearly teeth.

"But if I kill her who hates me," said Balsamo, wringing his hands, "I shall also kill her who loves me."

And his heart was filled with the deepest grief, strangely mingled with a vague desire.

"No, no," murmured he; "I have sworn in vain; I have threatened in vain; no, I shall never have the courage to kill her. She shall live, but she shall live without being awakened. She shall live this factitious life, which is happiness for her, while the other is despair. Would that I could make her happy! What matters to me the rest?—she shall only have one existence, the one I create, the one during which she loves me, that which she lives at this moment."

And he returned Lorenza's tender look by a look as tender as her own, placing his hand as he did so gently on her head. Lorenza, who seemed to read Balsamo's thoughts as if they were an open book, gave a long sigh, rose gradually with the graceful languor of sleep, and placed her two white arms upon Balsamo's shoulders, who felt her perfumed breath upon his cheek.

"Oh! no, no!" exclaimed Balsamo, passing his hand over his burning forehead and his dazzled eyes; "no, this intoxicating life will make me mad; and, with this siren, glory, power, immortality, will all vanish from my thoughts. No, no; she must awake, I must do it.

"Oh!" continued he, "if I awake her, the struggle will begin again. If I awake her, she will kill herself, or she will kill me, or force me to destroy her. Oh, what an abyss!

"Yes, this woman's destiny is written; it stands before me in letters of fire—love! death!—Lorenza, Lorenza! thou art doomed to love and to die! Lorenza, Lorenza! I hold thy life and thy love in my hands!"

Instead of a reply, the enchantress rose, advanced towards Balsamo, fell at his feet, and gazed into his eyes with a tender smile. Then she took one of his hands and placed it on her heart.

"Death!" said she in a low voice which whispered from her lips, brilliant as coral when it issues from the caverns of the deep; "death, but love!"

"Oh!" said Balsamo, "it is too much; I have struggled as long as a human being could struggle. Demon, or angel of futurity, whichever thou art! thou must be content. I have long enough sacrificed all the generous passions in my heart to egotism and pride. Oh! no, no—I have no right thus to rebel against the only human feeling which still remains lurking in my heart. I love this woman, I love her, and this passionate love injures her more than the most terrible hatred could do. This love kills her! Oh, coward! oh, ferocious fool that I am! I cannot even compromise with my desires. What! when I breathe my last sigh; when I prepare to appear before God—I, the deceiver, the false prophet—when I throw off my mantle of hypocrisy and artifice before the Sovereign Judge—shall I have not one generous action to confess, not the recollection of a single happiness to console me in the midst of my eternal sufferings?

"Oh! no, no, Lorenza; I know that in loving thee I lose the future;

I know that my revealing angel will wing its flight to heaven if I thus change your entire existence and overturn the natural laws of your being. But, Lorenza, you wish it, do you not?"

"My beloved!" she sighed.

"Then you accept the factitious instead of the real life?"

"I ask for it on my knees—I pray for it—I implore it. This life is love and happiness."

"And will it suffice for you when you are my wife, for I love you passionately?"

"Oh! I know it, I can read your heart."

"You will never regret your wings, poor dove; for know, that you will never again roam through radiant space for me to seek the ray of light Jehovah once deigned to bestow upon his prophets. When I would know the future, when I would command men, alas! alas! thy voice will not reply. I have had in thee the beloved woman and the helping spirit, I shall only have one of the two now; and yet——"

"Ah! you doubt, you doubt," cried Lorenza; "I see doubt like a dark stain upon your heart."

"You will always love me, Lorenza?"

"Always! always!"

Balsamo passed his hand over his forehead.

"Well! it shall be so," said he.

And raising Lorenza, he folded her in his arms and pressed a kiss upon her forehead—the seal of his promise to love and cherish her till death.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

LOVE.

FOR Balsamo another life had commenced, a life hitherto unknown in his active, troubled, multiplied existence. For three days there had been for him no more anger, no more apprehension, no more jealousy; for three days he had not heard the subject of politics, conspirators, or conspiracies, as much as whispered. By Lorenza's side, and he had not left her for an instant, he had forgotten the whole world. This strange inexplicable love, which, as it were, soared above humanity, this intoxicating and mysterious attachment, this love of a shadow, for he could not conceal from himself that with a word he could change his gentle bride into an implacable enemy—this love snatched from hatred, thanks to an inexplicable caprice of nature or of science, plunged Balsamo into happiness which bordered on madness.

More than once, during these three days, rousing himself from the opiate torpor of love, Balsamo looked at his ever smiling, ever ecstatic companion—for from thenceforth, in the existence he had created for her, she reposed from her factitious life in a sort of ecstacy equally factitious—and when he saw her calm, gentle, happy, when she called him by the most affectionate names, and dreamed aloud her mysterious love, he more than

once asked himself if some ruthless demon had not inspired Lorenza with the idea of deceiving him with a falsehood in order to lull his vigilance, and when it was lulled, to escape and only appear again as the Avenging Eumenides.

In such moments Balsamo doubted of the truth of a science received by tradition from antiquity, but of which he had no evidence but examples. But soon the ever-springing fountain of her affection reassured him.

"If Lorenza was feigning," argued he with himself, "if she intended to fly from me, she would seek opportunities for sending me away, she would invent excuses for occasional solitude; but, far from that, her gentle voice ever whispers, 'Stay!'"

Then Balsamo's confidence in himself and in science returned. What, indeed, should the magic secret to which alone he owned his power have become all at once, and without any transition, a chimera, fit only to be given to the winds as a vanished recollection, as the smoke of an extinguished fire? Never with relation to him had Lorenza been more lucid, more clear-sighted. All the thoughts which sprang up in his mind, all the feelings which made his heart bound, were instantly reproduced in hers. It remained to be seen if this lucidity were not sympathy; if, beyond herself and the young girl, beyond the circle which their love had traced, and which their love illuminated with its light—the eyes of her soul, so clear-sighted before this new era of continued sleep, could yet pierce the surrounding darkness.

Balsamo dared not make the decisive trial; he hoped still, and this hope was the resplendent crown of his happiness.

Sometimes Lorenza said to him, with gentle melancholy:

"Acharat, you think of another than me, of a northern woman, with fair hair and blue eyes. Acharat! Acharat! this woman always moves beside me in your thoughts."

Balsamo looked tenderly at Lorenza.

"You see that in me?" said he.

"Oh! yes; as clearly as I read the surface of a mirror.

"Then you know it is not love which makes me think of that woman," replied Balsamo. "Read in my heart, dearest Lorenza!"

"No," replied she, bending her head; "no, I know it well. But yet your thoughts are divided between us two, as in the days when Lorenza Feliciani tormented you—the naughty Lorenza, who sleeps, and when you will not again awake."

"No, my love, no," exclaimed Balsamo; "I think only of thee, at least with the heart. Have I not forgotten all, neglected everything—study, politics, work—since our happiness?"

"And you are wrong," said Lorenza, "for I could help you in your work."

"How?"

"Yes; did you not once spend whole hours in your laboratory?"

"Certainly. But I renounce all these vain endeavours. They would be so many hours taken from my life—for during that time I should not see you."

"And why should I not follow you in your labours as in your love? Why should I not make you powerful as I make you happy?"

"Because my Lorenza, it is true, is beautiful, but she has not studied. God gives beauty and love, but study alone gives science."

"The soul knows everything."

"Then you can really see with the eyes of your soul?"

"Yes."

"And you can guide me in the grand search after the philosopher's stone?"

"I think so."

"Come, then."

And Balsamo, encircling her waist with his arm, led her into his laboratory. The gigantic furnace, which no one had replenished for four days, was extinguished, and the crucibles had grown cold upon their chafing-dishes.

Lorenza looked around on all these strange instruments—the last combinations of expiring alchemy—without surprise. She seemed to know the purpose which each was intended to fulfil.

"You are attempting to make gold?" said she, smiling.

"Yes."

"All these crucibles contain preparations in different stages of progress?"

"All stopped—all lost; but I do not regret it."

"You are right, for your gold would never be anything but coloured mercury; you can render it solid, perhaps, but you cannot transform it."

"But gold can be made?"

"No."

"And yet Daniel of Transylvania sold the receipt for the transmutation of metals to Cosmo the First for twenty thousand ducats."

"Daniel of Transylvania deceived Cosmo the First."

"And yet the Saxon Payken, who was condemned to death by Charles the Second, ransomed his life by changing a leaden ingot into a golden one, from which forty ducats were coined, besides taking as much from the ingot as made a medal, which was struck in honour of the clever alchemist."

"The clever alchemist was nothing but a clever juggler. He merely substituted the golden ingot for the leaden one: nothing more. Your surest way of making gold, Acharat, is to melt into ingots, as you do already, the riches which your slaves bring you from the four quarters of the world."

Balsamo remained pensive.

"Then the transmutation of metals is impossible?" said he.

"Impossible."

"And the diamond—is it, too, impossible to create?"

"Oh! the diamond is another matter," said Lorenza.

"The diamond can be made, then?"

"Yes; for, to make the diamond, you have not to transmute one body into another; to make the diamond is merely to attempt the simple modification of a known element."

"Then you know the element of which the diamond is formed?"

"To be sure: the diamond is pure carbon crystallised."

Balsamo was almost stunned; a dazzling, unexpected, unheard-of light flashed before his eyes; he covered them with both hands, as if the flame had blinded him.

"Oh, bountiful Creator!" said he, "you give me too much—some danger threatens me! What precious ring must I throw into the sea to appease the jealousy of my fate? Enough, Lorenza, for to-day!"

"Am I not yours? Order, command me!"

"Yes, you are mine. Come, come!"

And he drew her out of the laboratory, crossed the chamber of furs, and,

without paying any attention to a light creaking noise he heard overhead, he once more entered the barred room with Lorenza.

"So you are pleased with your Lorenza, my beloved Balsamo?"

"Oh!" exclaimed he.

"What did you fear, then? Speak—tell me all."

Balsamo clasped his hands, and looked at Lorenza with an expression of such terror that a spectator ignorant of what was passing in his heart would have been totally at a loss to account for it.

"Oh!" murmured he, "and I was near killing this angel—I was near expiring of despair before resolving the problem of being at once powerful and happy! I forgot that the limits of the possible always exceed the horizon traced by the present state of science, and that the majority of truths which have become facts have always in their infancy been looked upon as dreams! I thought I knew everything, and I knew nothing!"

The young Italian smiled divinely.

"Lorenza, Lorenza!" continued Balsamo, "the mysterious design of the Creator is, then, accomplished which makes woman to be born of the substance of the man, and which commands them to have only one heart in common! Eve is revived for me—an Eve who will not have a thought that is not mine, and whose life hangs by the thread which I hold. It is too much, my God, for a creature to possess! I sink under the weight of Thy gift!"

And he fell upon his knees, gazing with adoration upon the gentle beauty, who smiled on him as no earthly creature can smile.

"Oh no!" he continued; "no, you shall never leave me more! I shall live in all safety under your look, which can pierce into the future. You will assist me in those laborious researches which you alone, as you have said, can complete, and which one word from you will render easy and successful. You will point me out, since I cannot make gold, gold being a homogeneous substance, a primitive element—you will point me out in what corner of the world the Creator has concealed it; you will tell me where the rich treasures lie which have been swallowed up in the vast depths of the ocean. With your eyes I shall see the pearl grow in the veined shell, and man's thoughts spring up under their gross earthly covering. With your ears I shall hear the dull sound of the worm beneath the ground, and the footsteps of mine enemy as he approaches!"

And Lorenza still smiled upon him, and as she smiled she replied to his words by affectionate caresses.

"And yet," whispered she, as if she could see each thought which whirled through his restless brain, "and yet you doubt still, Acharat, as you have said, if I can cross the circle of our love—you doubt if I can see into the distance; but you console yourself by thinking that if I cannot see, she can."

"She! Who?"

"The fair-haired beauty. Shall I tell you her name?"

"Yes."

"Stay—Andrée!"

"Ah, yes; you can read my thoughts! Yet a last expiring fear still troubles me. Can you still see through space, though material obstacles intervene?"

"Try me."

"Give me your hand, Lorenza."

The young girl passionately seized Balsamo's hand.

"Can you follow me?"

BALSAMO AND LORENZA.

"Anywhere!"

"Come!"

And Balsamo, leaving in thought the Rue Saint Claude, drew Lorenza's thoughts along with him.

"Where are we?" asked he.

"We are upon a hill," replied the young Italian.

"Yes, you are right," said Balsamo, trembling with delight. "But what do you see?"

"Before me, to the right, or to the left?"

"Before you."

"I see a long alley, with a wood on one side, a town on the other, and a river which separates them and loses itself in the horizon, after flowing under the walls of a large château."

"That is right, Lorenza. The forest is that of Vesinet; the town St. Germain; the château is the Château de Maisons. Let us enter the pavilion behind us. What do you see there?"

"Ah! in the first place, in the antechamber, a little negro, fantastically dressed, and employed in eating sugar-plums."

"Yes, Zamore. Proceed, proceed!"

"An empty saloon, splendidly furnished; the spaces above the doors painted with goddesses and Cupids."

"The saloon is empty, you say?"

"Yes."

"Let us go still further."

"Ah! we are in a splendid boudoir, lined with blue satin embroidered with flowers of natural colours."

"Is that empty also?"

"No; a lady is reclining upon a sofa."

"What lady? Do you not remember to have seen her before?"

"Yes; it is the Countess Dubarry."

"Right, Lorenza! I shall go frantic with delight! What does the lady do?"

"She is thinking of you, Balsamo."

"Of me?"

"Yes."

"Then you can read her thoughts?"

"Yes, for I repeat she is thinking of you."

"For what purpose?"

"You have made her a promise."

"Yes."

"You promised her that water of beauty which Venus, to revenge herself on Sappho, gave to Phaon."

"Yes, yes, you are right again! And what does she do while thinking?"

"She comes to a decision."

"What decision?"

"She reaches out her hand towards the bell; she rings; another young lady enters."

"Dark or light haired?"

"Dark."

"Tall or short?"

"Little."

"Her sister. Listen to what she says to her."

"She orders the horses to be put to her carriage."

"Where does she wish to go?"

"To come here."

"Are you sure?"

"She is giving the order. Stay—she is obeyed. I see the horses and the carriage. In two hours she will be here."

Balsamo fell upon his knees.

"Oh!" exclaimed he, "if in two hours she should really be here, I shall have nothing left to ask for on earth!"

"My poor Balsamo! then you still feared?"

"Yes, yes!"

"And why did you fear? Love, which completes the material existence, increases also our mental powers. Love, like every generous emotion, brings us nearer to God, and all wisdom comes from God."

"Lorenza, Lorenza, you will drive me mad with joy!"

Balsamo now only waited for another proof to be completely happy. This proof was the arrival of Madame Dubarry.

The two hours of suspense were short. All measure of time had completely ceased for Balsamo.

Suddenly the young girl started and took Balsamo's hand.

"You are doubting yet," said she, "or you wish to know where she is at this moment."

"Yes," said Balsamo, "you are right."

"Well," replied Lorenza, "she is thundering along the Boulevards at the full speed of her horses; she approaches; she turns into the Rue Saint Claude; she stops before the door and knocks."

The apartment in which they were was so retired and so quiet that the noise of the iron knocker could not penetrate its recesses; but Balsamo, raised upon one knee, was anxiously listening.

At this moment two knocks struck by Fritz made him bound to his feet, for the reader will remember that two knocks were the signal of an important visit.

"Oh!" said he, "then it is true!"

"Go and convince yourself, Balsamo; but return quickly."

Balsamo advanced towards the fireplace.

"Let me accompany you," said Lorenza, "as far as the door of the staircase."

"Come!"

And they both passed together into the chamber of furs.

"You will not leave this room?"

"No; I will await you here. Oh, do not fear; you know the Lorenza who loves you is not the Lorenza whom you fear. Besides——"

She stopped and smiled.

"What?" asked Balsamo.

"Can you not read in my soul as I read yours?"

"Alas! no."

"Besides, you can command me to sleep until you return. Command me to remain immovable upon this sofa, and I shall sleep and be motionless."

"Well, my Lorenza, it shall be so. Sleep, and await my return here!"

Lorenza, already struggling with sleep, fell back upon the sofa, murmuring:

"You will return soon, my Balsamo, will you not?"

Balsamo waved his hand; Lorenza was already asleep; but so beautiful, so pure, with her long flowing hair, the feverish glow upon her cheeks, her

half-opened and swimming eyes, so little like a mortal, that Balsamo turned again, took her hand and kissed it, but dared not kiss her lips.

Two knocks were heard a second time. The lady was becoming impatient, or Fritz feared that his master had not heard him. Balsamo hastened to the door, but as he closed it behind him, he fancied he heard a second creaking noise like the former one. He opened the door again, looked round, and saw nothing but Lorenza sleeping, and her breast heaving beneath the magnetic sleep.

Balsamo closed the door and hastened towards the salon, without uneasiness, without fear, without foreboding—all heaven in his heart! But he was mistaken: it was not sleep alone which oppressed Lorenza's bosom and made her breathe so heavily. It was a kind of dream which seemed to belong to the lethargy in which she was plunged—a lethargy which so nearly resembled death.

Lorenza dreamed, and in the hideous mirror of her gloomy dreams she fancied she saw, through the darkness which commenced to close around her, the oaken ceiling open, and something like a large circular platform descend slowly with a regular, slow, measured movement, accompanied by a disagreeable hissing noise. It seemed to her as if she breathed with difficulty, as if she were almost suffocated by the pressure of this moving circle.

It seemed to her as if upon this moving trap something moved—some mis-shapen being like Caliban in "The Tempest"—a monster with a human face—an old man whose eyes and arms alone were living, and who looked at her with his frightful eyes, and stretched his fleshless arms towards her.

And she—she, poor child!—she writhed in vain, without power to escape, without dreaming of the danger which threatened her. She felt nothing but the grasp of two living flesh-hooks seizing upon her white dress, lifting her from her sofa and placing her upon the trap, which reascended slowly towards the ceiling, with the grating noise of iron scraping against iron, and amidst a hideous mocking laugh from the monster with the human face who was raising her aloft without shock and without pain.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

THE PHILTRE.

As Lorenza had foretold, it was Madame Dubarry who had just knocked at the gate.

The beautiful countess had been ushered into the salon. Whilst awaiting Balsamo's arrival, she was looking over that curious Book of Death engraved at Mayence, the plates of which, designed with marvellous skill, show death presiding over all the acts of man's life, waiting for him at the door of the ball-room after he has pressed the hand of the woman he loves, dragging him to the bottom of the water in which he is bathing, or, hiding in the barrel of the gun he carries to the chase. Madame

Dubarry was at the plate which represents a beautiful woman daubing her face with rouge and looking at herself in the glass, when Balsamo opened the door and bowed to her, with the smile of happiness still beaming upon his face.

"Excuse me, madame, for having made you wait; but I had not well calculated the distance, or was ignorant of the speed of your horses. I thought you still at the Place Louis XV."

"What do you mean?" asked the countess. "You knew I was coming, then?"

"Yes, madame; it is about two hours ago since I saw you in your boudoir lined with blue satin, giving orders for your horses to be put to the carriage."

"And you say I was in my blue satin boudoir?"

"Embroidered with flowers coloured after nature. Yes, countess, you were reclining upon a sofa; a pleasing thought passed through your mind: you said to yourself, 'I will go and visit the Count de Fenix,' then you rang the bell."

"And who entered?"

"Your sister, countess—am I right? You requested her to transmit your orders, which were instantly executed."

"Truly, count, you *are* a sorcerer. You really alarm me."

"Oh! have no fear, countess; my sorcery is very harmless."

"And you saw that I was thinking of you?"

"Yes; and even that you thought of me with benevolent intentions."

"Ah! you are right, my dear count; I have the best possible intentions towards you, but confess that you deserve more than intentions—you, who are so kind and so useful, and who seem destined to play in my life the part of tutor, which is the most difficult part I know."

"In truth, madame, you make me very happy. Then I have been of use to you?"

"What! you are a sorcerer, and cannot guess?"

"Allow me, at least, the merit of being modest."

"As you please, my dear count; then I will first speak of what I have done for you."

"I cannot permit it, madame; on the contrary, speak of yourself, I beseech you."

"Well, my dear count, in the first place, give me that talisman which renders one invisible; for on my journey here, rapid as it was, I fancied I recognised one of M. de Richelieu's greys."

"And this grey?"

"Followed my carriage, carrying on his back a courier."

"What do you think of this circumstance, and for what purpose could the duke have caused you to be followed?"

"With the intention of playing me some scurvy trick. Modest as you are, my dear Count de Fenix, you must be aware that Nature has gifted you with personal advantages enough to make a king jealous of my visits to you, or of yours to me."

"M. de Richelieu cannot be dangerous to you in any way, madame," replied Balsamo.

"But he was so, my dear count; he was dangerous before this last event."

Balsamo comprehended that there was a secret concealed beneath these words which Lorenza had not yet revealed to him. He did not therefore venture on the unknown ground, and replied merely by a smile.

"He was indeed," repeated the countess; "and I was nearly falling a victim to a most skilfully constructed plot—a plot in which you also had some share, count."

"I! engaged in a plot against you? Never, madame!"

"Was it not you who gave the Duke de Richelieu the philtre?"

"What philtre?"

"A draught which causes the most ardent love."

"No, madame; M. de Richelieu composes those draughts himself, for he has long known the receipt; I merely gave him a simple narcotic."

"Ah! indeed?"

"Upon my honour!"

"And on what day did M. de Richelieu ask for this narcotic? Remember the date, count; it is of importance."

"Madame, it was last Saturday—the day previous to that on which I had the honour of sending you, through Fritz, the note requesting you to meet me at M. de Sartines.'"

"The eve of that day!" exclaimed the countess. "The eve of the day on which the king was seen going to the Little Trianon? Oh! now everything is explained."

"Then, if all is explained, you see I only gave the narcotic."

"Yes, the narcotic saved us all."

This time Balsamo waited; he was profoundly ignorant of the subject.

"I am delighted, madame," replied he, "to have been useful to you, even unintentionally."

"Oh! you are always kindness itself. But you can do more for me than you have ever yet done. Oh, doctor! I have been very ill, practically speaking, and even now I can yet scarcely believe in my recovery."

"Madame," said Balsamo, "the doctor, since there is a doctor in the case, always requires the details of the illness he is to cure. Will you give me the exact particulars of what you have experienced?—and if possible, do not forget a single symptom."

"Nothing can be more simple, my dear doctor, or dear sorcerer—whichever you prefer. The eve of the day on which this narcotic was used, his majesty refused to accompany me to Luciennes. He remained, like a deceiver as he is, at Trianon, pretending fatigue, and yet, as I have since learned, he supped at Trianon with the Duke de Richelieu and the Baron de Taverney."

"Ha!"

"Now you understand. At supper the love-draught was given to the king."

"Well, what happened?"

"Oh! that is difficult to discover. The king was seen going in the direction of the offices of Trianon; and all I can tell you is, that his majesty returned to Trianon through a fearful storm, pale, trembling, and feverish—almost on the verge of delirium."

"And you think," said Balsamo, smiling, "that it was not the storm alone which alarmed his majesty?"

"No, for the valet heard him cry several times, 'Dead, dead, dead!'"

"Oh!" said Balsamo.

"It was the narcotic," continued Madame Dubarry. "Nothing alarms the king so much as death, and next to death its semblance. He had found Mademoiselle de Taverney sleeping a strange sleep, and must have thought her dead."

"Yes, yes; dead indeed," said Balsamo, who remembered having fled

without awakening Andrée ; "dead, or at least presenting all the appearance of death. Yes, yes—it must be so. Well, madame, and what then?"

"No one knows what happened during the night. The king, on his return, was attacked by a violent fever and a nervous trembling, which did not leave him until the morning, when it occurred to the dauphiness to open the shutters and show his majesty a lovely morning, with the sun shining upon merry faces. Then all these unknown visions disappeared with the night which had produced them. At noon the king was better, took some broth, and ate a partridge's wing ; and in the evening——"

"And in the evening—— ?" repeated Balsamo.

"In the evening," continued Madame Dubarry, "his majesty, who no doubt would not stay at Trianon after his fright, came to see me at Luciennes."

The triumphant countenance and graceful but roguish look of the countess reassured Balsamo as to the power the favourite yet exercised over the king.

"Then you are satisfied with me, madame?" inquired he.

"Delighted, count ! and when you spoke of impossibilities you could create, you told the exact truth."

And in token of thanks she gave him her soft, white, perfumed hand, which was not fresh as Lorenza's, but almost as beautiful.

"And now, count, let us speak of yourself."

Balsamo bowed like a man ready to listen.

"If you have preserved me from a great danger," continued Madame Dubarry, "I think I have also saved you from no inconsiderable peril."

"Me !" said Balsamo, concealing his emotion. "I do not require that to feel grateful to you ; but yet, be good enough to inform me what——"

"Yes. The coffer in question——"

"Well, madame?"

"Contained a multitude of secret ciphers, which M. de Sartines caused all his clerks to translate. All signed their several translations, executed apart, and all gave the same result. In consequence of this, M. de Sartines arrived at Versailles this morning while I was there, bringing with him all these translations and the dictionary of diplomatic ciphers."

"Ha !—and what did the king say?"

"The king seemed surprised at first, then alarmed. His majesty easily listens to those who speak to him of danger. Since the stab of Damien's penknife, there is one word which is ever eagerly hearkened to by Louis XV.; it is—*Take care !*"

"Then M. de Sartines accused me of plotting?"

"At first M. de Sartines endeavoured to make me leave the room ; but I refused, declaring that as no one was more attached to his majesty than myself, no one had a right to make me leave him when danger was in question. M. de Sartines insisted, but I resisted, and the king, looking at me in a manner I know well, said :

"'Let her remain, Sartines : I can refuse her nothing to-day.'

"Then you understand, count, that as I was present, M. de Sartines remembering our adieu, so clearly expressed, feared to displease me by attacking you. He therefore spoke of the evil designs of the King of Prussia towards France ; of the disposition prevalent to facilitate the march of rebellion by supernatural means. In a word, he accused a great many people, proving always by the papers he held that these persons were guilty."

"Guilty of what?"

"Of what! Count, dare I disclose secrets of state?"

"Which are our secrets, madame. Oh! you risk nothing. I think it is my interest not to speak."

"Yes, count, I know that M. de Sartines wished to prove that a numerous and powerful sect, composed of bold, skilful, resolute agents, were silently undermining the respect due to the king, by spreading certain reports concerning his majesty."

"What rumours?"

"Saying, for instance, that his majesty was accused of starving his people."

"To which the king replied——?"

"As the king always replies, by a joke."

Balsamo breathed again.

"And what was the joke?" he asked.

"'Since I am accused of starving the people,' said he, 'there is only one reply to make to the accusation—let us feed them.'

"'How so, sire?' said M. de Sartines.

"'I will take the charge of feeding all those who spread this report, and, moreover, will give them safe lodging in my château of the Bastille.'"

A slight shudder passed through Balsamo's limbs, but he retained his smiling countenance.

"What followed?" asked he.

"Then the king seemed to consult me by a smile. 'Sire,' said I, 'I can never believe that those little black characters which M. de Sartines has brought to you mean that you are a bad king.'

"Then the lieutenant of police exclaimed loudly.

"'Any more,' I added, 'than they prove that our clerks can read.'"

"And what did the king say, countess?" asked Balsamo.

"That I might be right, but that M. de Sartines was not wrong."

"Well, and then?"

"Then a great many *lettres-de-cachet* were made out, and I saw that M. de Sartines tried to slip amongst them one for you; but I stood firm, and arrested him by a single word.

"'Sir,' I said aloud, and before the king, 'arrest all Paris, if you like—that is your business; but you had better reflect a little before you lay a finger on one of my friends—if not——'

"'Oh, ho!' said the king, 'she is getting angry; take care, Sartines.'

"'But, sire, the interest of the kingdom——'

"'Oh! you are not a Sully,' said I, crimson with rage, 'and I am not a Gabrielle.'

"'Madame, they intend to assassinate the king, as Henri IV. was assassinated.'

"For the first time, the king turned pale, trembled, and put his hand to his head.

"I feared I was vanquished.

"'Sire,' said I, 'you must let M. de Sartines have his own way; for his clerks have, no doubt, read in these ciphers that I also am conspiring against you.'

"And I left the room.

"But, *dame!* my dear count, the king preferred my company to that of M. de Sartines, and ran after me.

"'Ah! for pity's sake, my dear countess,' said he, 'pray do not get angry.'

"'Then send away that horrid man, sire; he smells of dungeons.'

"'Go, Sartines—be off with you!' said the king, shrugging his shoulders.

"'And, for the future, I forbid you not only to visit me, but even to bow to me,' added I.

"At this blow our magistrate became alarmed; he approached me, and humbly kissed my hand.

"'Well,' said he, 'so be it; let us speak no more of it, fair lady. But you will ruin the state. Since you absolutely insist upon it, your protégé shall be respected by my agents.'"

Balsamo seemed plunged in a deep reverie.

"Well," said the countess, "so you do not even thank me for having saved you from the pleasure of lodging in the Bastille, which perhaps might have been unjust, but assuredly no less disagreeable on that account?"

Balsamo made no reply. He drew a small phial, filled with a fluid red as blood, from his pocket.

"Hold, madame!" said he; "for the liberty you have procured for me I give you twenty years' additional youth!"

The countess slipped the phial into her bosom, and took her leave joyous and triumphant.

Balsamo still remained thinking.

"They might perhaps have been saved," said he, "but for the coquetry of a woman. This courtezan's little foot dashes them down into the depths of the abyss. Decidedly, God is with us!"

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

BLOOD.

THE door had no sooner closed upon Madame Dubarry than Balsamo ascended the secret staircase and entered the chamber of furs. This conversation with the countess had been long, and his impatience had two causes.

The first was the desire to see Lorenza; the second, the fear that she might be fatigued, for in the new life he had given her there was no rest for weariness of mind. She might be fatigued, inasmuch as she might pass, as she sometimes did, from the magnetic sleep to ecstasy; and this ecstatic state always succeeded those nervous crises which prostrate Lorenza's strength, if the intervention of the restoring fluid did not restore the necessary equilibrium between the various functions of her being.

Balsamo, therefore, having entered and closed the door, immediately glanced at the couch where he had left Lorenza.

She was no longer there!

Only the fine shawl of cashmere embroidered with golden flowers, which had enveloped her like a scarf, was still lying upon the cushions, as evidence that she had been in the room and had been reclining on the couch.

Balsamo stood motionless, gazing at the empty sofa. Perhaps Lorenza had felt herself incommoded by a strange odour which seemed to be

filled the room since he left it; perhaps, by a mechanical movement, she had usurped some of the functions of actual life, and instinctively changed her place.

Balsamo's first idea was that Lorenza had returned to the laboratory, whither she had accompanied him a short time previously.

He entered the laboratory. At the first glance it seemed empty; but in the shadow of the gigantic furnace, or behind the oriental tapestry, a woman could easily conceal herself.

He raised the tapestry, therefore—he made the circuit of the furnace; nowhere could he discover even a trace of Lorenza.

There remained only the young girl's chamber, to which she had, no doubt, returned; for this chamber was a prison to her only in her waking state.

He hastened to the chamber, and found the secret door closed. This was no proof that Lorenza had not entered. Nothing was more probable, in fact, than that Lorenza, in her lucid sleep, had remembered the mechanism, and, remembering it, had obeyed the hallucination of a dream barely effaced from her mind. Balsamo pressed the spring.

The chamber was empty, like the laboratory; it did not appear as if Lorenza had even entered it.

Then a heart-rending thought—a thought which, it will be remembered, had already stung his heart—chased away all the suppositions, all the hopes of the happy lover.

Lorenza had been playing a part; she must have feigned to sleep in order to banish all distrust, all uneasiness, all watchfulness from her husband's mind; and at the first opportunity had fled again, this time with surer precautions, warned as she had been by a first, or rather by two former experiences.

At this idea Balsamo started up and rang for Fritz.

Then, as Fritz, to his impatient mind, seemed to delay, he hastened to meet him, and found him on the secret staircase.

"The signora?" said he.

"Well, master?" said Fritz, seeing by Balsamo's agitation that something extraordinary had taken place.

"Have you seen her?"

"No, master."

"She has not gone?"

"From where?"

"From this house, to be sure!"

"No one has left the house but the countess, behind whom I have just closed the gate."

Balsamo rushed up the stairs again like a madman. Then he fancied that the giddy young creature, so different in her sleep from what she was when waking, had concealed herself in a moment of childish playfulness; that from the corner where she was hid she was now reading his heart, and amusing herself by terrifying him, in order to reassure him afterwards. Then he recommenced a minute search.

Not a nook was omitted, not a cupboard forgotten, not a screen left in its proper place. There was something in this search of Balsamo's like the frantic efforts of a man blinded by passion, alternating with the feeble and tottering gait of a drunkard. He could then only stretch out his arms and cry, "Lorenza, Lorenza!" hoping that the adored creature would rush forth suddenly, and throw herself into his arms with an exclamation of joy.

But silence alone, a gloomy and uninterrupted silence, replied to his extravagant thoughts and mad appeals.

In running wildly about, dashing aside the furniture, shouting to the naked walls, calling Lorenza, staring without seeing any object or forming a single coherent thought, Balsamo passed three minutes—that is to say, three centuries—of agony.

He recovered by degrees from this half insane hallucination, dipped his hand in a vase of iced water, moistened his temples, and pressing one hand in the other, as if to force himself to be cool, he chased back by his iron will the blood which was beating wildly against his brain, with that fatal, incessant, monotonous movement which indicates life when there is merely motion and silence, but which is a sign of death or madness when it becomes tumultuous and perceptible.

"Come!" said he, "let me reason. Lorenza is not here—no more false pretences with myself. Lorenza is not here; she must be gone—yes, gone, quite gone!"

And he looked around once more, and once more shouted her name.

"Gone!" continued he. "In vain Fritz asserts that he has not seen her. She is gone—gone!

"Two cases present themselves.

"Either he has not seen Lorenza—and, after all, that is possible, for man is liable to error—or he has seen her, and has been bribed by her.

"Fritz bribed!

"Why not? In vain does his past fidelity plead against this supposition. If Lorenza, if love, if science, could so deeply deceive and lie, why should the frail nature of a fallible human being not deceive also?

"Oh, I will know all—I will know all! Is there not Mademoiselle de Taverney left? Yes, through Andrée I shall know if Fritz has betrayed me, if Lorenza is false! And this time—oh! this time, as love has proved false, as science has proved an error, as fidelity has become a snare—oh! this time Balsamo will punish without pity, without sparing, like a strong man who revenges himself, who chases pity from his heart, and keeps only pride.

"Let me see: the first step is to leave this as quickly as possible, not to let Fritz suspect anything, and to fly to Trianon."

And Balsamo, seizing his hat, which had rolled on the ground, rushed towards the door.

But all at once he stopped.

"Oh!" said he, "before anything else—my God! poor old man, I had forgotten him—I must see Althotas. During my delirium, during this spasm of forced and unnatural love, I have neglected the unfortunate old man, I have been ungrateful and inhuman!"

And, with the feverishness which now animated all his movements, Balsamo approached the spring which put in motion the trap in the ceiling, and the movable scaffold quickly descended.

Balsamo placed himself upon it, and, aided by the counterpoise, mounted again, still overwhelmed by the anguish of his mind and heart, and without thinking of anything but Lorenza. Scarcely had he attained the level of the floor, when the voice of Althotas struck upon his ear, and roused him from his gloomy reverie.

But, to Balsamo's great astonishment, the old man's first words were not reproaches, as he had expected; he was received with an outburst of simple and natural gaiety.

The pupil looked with an astonished gaze upon his master.

The old man was reclining upon his spring-chair. He breathed noisily and with delight, as if at each inspiration he added a day to his life; his eyes, full of a gloomy fire, but the expression of which was enlivened by the smile upon his lips, were fixed eagerly upon his visitor.

Balsamo summoned up all his strength and collected his ideas, in order to conceal his grief from his master, who had so little indulgence for human weaknesses.

During this moment of reflection, Balsamo felt a strange oppression weigh upon his breast. No doubt the air was vitiated by being too constantly breathed, for a heavy, dull, close, nauseous odour, like the one he had already felt below, but there in a slighter degree, floated in the air, and, like the vapours which rise from lakes and marshes in autumn at sunrise and sunset, had taken a shape and rested on the windows.

In this dense and acrid atmosphere Balsamo's heart throbbed, his head felt confused, a vertigo seized upon him, and he felt that respiration and strength were fast failing him.

"Master," said he, seeking some object on which to support himself, and endeavouring to dilate his lungs; "master, you cannot live here; there is no air."

"You think so?"

"Oh!"

"Nevertheless, I breathe very well in it," replied Althotas gaily, "and I live, as you see!"

"Master, master," replied Balsamo, growing more and more giddy, "let me open a window! See! it rises from the floor like an exhalation of blood!"

"Of blood! Ah! you think so? Of blood?" cried Althotas, bursting into a laugh.

"Oh, yes, yes; I feel the miasma which is exhaled from a newly-killed body. I could weigh it, so heavily does it press upon my brain and heart."

"That is it," said Althotas, with his sardonic laugh; "that is it; I also perceived it. You have a tender heart and a weak brain, Acharat."

"Master," said Balsamo, pointing with his finger at the old man, "master, you have blood upon your hands; master, there is blood upon this table; there is blood everywhere, even in your eyes, which shine like two torches; master, the smell which I breathe, and which makes me giddy, which is suffocating me, is the smell of blood!"

"Well, what then?" said Althotas, quickly; "is this the first time in your life that you have smelt it?"

"No."

"Have you never seen me make experiments? Have you never made any yourself!"

"But human blood!" said Balsamo, pressing his hand upon his burning forehead.

"Ah! you have a subtle sense of smell," said Althotas. "Well, I did not think human blood could be distinguished from that of any other animal."

"Human blood!" muttered Balsamo.

And as he reeled backwards and felt for some projecting point to support him, he perceived with horror a vast copper basin, the shining sides of which reflected the purple colour of the freshly-spilled blood.

The enormous vase was half filled.

Balsamo started back, terrified.

"Oh, this blood!" exclaimed he: "from whence comes this blood?"

Althotas made no reply, but his watchful glance lost none of the feverish fluctuations and wild terror of Balsamo. Suddenly the latter uttered a fearful groan.

Then, stooping like some wild beast darting upon its prey, he rushed to a corner of the room and picked up from the floor a silken ribbon embroidered with silver, to which was hanging a long tress of black hair.

After this wild, mournful, terrible cry, a deathlike silence reigned for a moment in the old man's apartment. Balsamo slowly raised the ribbon, shuddered as he examined the tresses which a golden pin fastened to the silk at one end, while, cut off sharply at the other, they seemed like a fringe the extremity of which had been dipped in a wave of blood, the red and sparkling drops of which were still apparent on the margin.

In proportion as Balsamo raised his hand, it trembled still more.

As he looked more intently at the ribbon, his cheeks grew a deeper livid.

"From whence does this come?" murmured he in a hollow voice, loud enough, however, for another to hear and to reply to his question.

"That?" asked Althotas.

"Yes, that."

"Well! it is a silken ribbon tying some hair."

"But the hair—in what is it steeped?"

"You can see—in blood."

"In what blood?"

"Parbleu! in the blood I wanted for my elixir—in the blood which you refused me, and which, therefore, I was forced to procure for myself."

"But this hair, these tresses, this ribbon—from whom did you take them? This is not a child's hair."

"And who told you it was a child I had killed?" asked Althotas, quietly.

"Did you not want the blood of a child for your elixir?" said Balsamo. "Did you not tell me so?"

"Or of an unmarried female, Acharat—or of an unmarried female."

And Althotas stretched his long bony hand from the chair, and took a phial, the contents of which he tasted with delight.

Then, in his most natural tone and with his most affectionate smile:

"I have to thank you, Acharat," said he: "you were wise and far-sighted in placing that woman beneath my trap, almost within reach of my hand. Humanity has no cause for complaint. The law has nothing to lay hold upon. He! he!—it was not you who gave me the young creature without whom I should have perished. No! I took her. He! he!—thanks, my dear pupil! thanks, my dear Acharat!"

And he once more put the phial to his lips.

Balsamo let fall the tress of hair which he held; a dreadful light flashed across his mind.

Opposite to him was the old man's table—a large marble slab always heaped with plants, books, and phials. This table was covered with a long cloth of white damask with dark flowers, on which the lamp of Althotas shed a reddish light, and which displayed an ominous outline which Balsamo had not before remarked.

He seized a corner of the cloth and hastily pulled it away.

But instantly his hair stood on end—his gaping mouth could not utter the horrible cry which almost suffocated him.

Under this shroud he had perceived Lorenza's corpse stretched upon

this table, her face livid and yet smiling, and her head hanging backwards as if dragged down by the weight of her long hair.

A large wound gaped underneath the collar-bone, from which not a single drop of blood escaped. Her hands were rigid, and her eyes closed beneath their purple eyelids.

"Yes, blood!—the last three drops of an unmarried woman's blood; that is what I wanted," said the old man, putting the phial to his lips for the third time.

"Wretch!" thundered Balsamo, whose cry of despair at last burst from each pore, "die, then! for she was my WIFE—my wedded wife! You have murdered her in vain! Die in your sin!"

The eyes of Althotas quivered at these words as if an electric shock had made them dance in their orbits; his pupils were fearfully dilated, his toothless gums chattered, the phial fell from his hand upon the floor and broke into a thousand pieces, whilst he—stupefied, annihilated, struck at once in heart and brain—fell back heavily upon his chair.

Balsamo bent with a sob over Lorenza's body, and pressing his lips to her blood-stained hair, sank senseless on the ground.

CHAPTER CXXIX.

DESPAIR.

THE Hours, those mysterious sisters, who cleave the air hand-in-hand with a flight so slow for the wretched, so rapid for the happy, paused in their onward motion, folding their heavy wings over this chamber loaded with sighs and groans.

Death on one side, agony on the other, and between them despair—grievous as agony, deep as death.

Balsamo had not uttered a word since the terrible cry which had been wrung from his breast.

Since the terrible revelation which had cast down the ferocious joy of Althotas, Balsamo had not moved.

As for the hideous old man, thus violently thrown back into life such as God grants to man, he seemed as much bewildered in this new element as the bird struck by a leaden bullet and fallen from the skies into a lake, on whose surface it flutters, unable to employ its wings.

The horror expressed in his pale and agonised features revealed the immeasurable extent of his disappointment.

In fact, Althotas no longer even took the trouble to think, since he had seen the goal at which his spirit aimed, and which it thought firm as a rock, vanish like empty vapour.

His deep and silent despair seemed almost like insensibility. To a mind unaccustomed to measure his, it might have seemed an indication of reflection; to Balsamo's, who, however, did not even look upon him, it marked the death-agony of power, of reason, and of life.

Althotas never took his eyes from the broken phial, the image of the nothingness of his hopes. One would have said he counted the thousand scattered fragments, which, in falling, had diminished his life by so many days. One would have said he wished to drink in with his look the precious fluid which was spilled upon the floor, and which, for a moment, he had believed to be immortality.

At times, also, as if the grief of this disenchantment was too poignant, the old man raised his dull eyes to Balsamo, then from Balsamo his glance wandered to Lorenza's corpse.

He resembled, at these moments, one of those savage animals which the huntsman finds in the morning caught in the trap by the leg, and which he stirs for a long time with his foot without making them turn their heads, but who, when he pricks them with his hunting-knife, or with the bayonet of his fowling-piece, obliquely raise their bloodshot eyes, throwing on him a look of hatred, vengeance, reproach, and surprise.

"Is it possible," said this look, so expressive even in its atony, "is it credible that so many misfortunes, so many shocks, should overwhelm me, caused by such an insignificant being as the man I see kneeling there a few yards from me, at the feet of such a vulgar object as that dead woman? Is it not a reversion of nature, an overturning of science, a cataclysm of reason, that the gross student should have deceived the skilful master? Is it not monstrous that the grain of sand should have arrested the wheel of the superb chariot, so rapid in its almost unlimited power, in its immortal flight?"

As for Balsamo—stunned, heart-broken, without voice or motion, almost without life—no human thought had yet dawned amid the dark vapours of his brain.

Lorenza! his Lorenza! His wife, his idol, doubly precious to him as his revealing angel and his love—Lorenza, his delight and his glory, the present and the future, his strength and faith—Lorenza, all he loved, all he wished for, all he desired in this world—Lorenza was lost to him for ever!

He did not weep, he did not groan, he did not even sigh.

He was scarcely surprised at the dreadful misfortune which had befallen him. He was like one of those poor wretches whom an inundation surprises in their bed, in the midst of darkness. They dream that the water gains upon them, they awake, they open their eyes and see a roaring billow breaking over their head, while they have not even time to utter a cry in their passage from life to death.

During three hours Balsamo felt himself buried in the deepest abyss of the tomb. In his overwhelming grief, he looked upon what had happened to him as one of the dark dreams which torment the dead in the eternal silent night of the sepulchre.

For him there no longer existed Althotas, and with him all hatred and revenge had vanished. For him there no longer existed Lorenza, and with her all life, all love had fled. All was sleep, night, nothingness! Thus the hours glided past, gloomily, silently, heavily, in this chamber where the blood congealed and the lifeless form grew rigid.

Suddenly amidst the deathlike silence a bell sounded thrice.

Fritz, doubtless, was aware that his master was with Althotas, for the bell sounded in the room itself.

But although it sounded three times with an insolently strange noise, the sound died away in space.

Balsamo did not raise his head.

In a few moments, the same tinkling, only louder this time, sounded again ; but, like the first, it could not rouse Balsamo from his torpor.

Then, at a measured interval, but not so far from the second as it had been from the first, the angry bell a third time made the room resound with multiplied echoes of its wailing and impatient sounds.

Balsamo did not start, but slowly raised his head and interrogated the empty space before him with the cold solemnity of a corpse rising from the tomb.

The bell never ceased ringing.

At last his increasing energy awoke him to partial consciousness. The unfortunate husband took his hand from the hand of the corpse. All the heat had left his body without passing into his lifeless bride's.

"Some important news or some great danger," muttered Balsamo to himself. "May it prove a great danger !"

And he rose to his feet.

"But why should I reply to this summons ?" continued he, aloud, without heeding the gloomy sound of his words echoing beneath the sombre vault of this funereal chamber ; "can anything in this world henceforth interest or alarm me ?"

Then, as if in reply, the bell struck its iron tongue so rudely against its brazen sides, that the clapper broke and fell upon a glass retort, which flew in pieces with a metallic sound, and scattered the fragments upon the floor.

Balsamo resisted no longer ; besides, it was important that none, not even Fritz, should come to seek him where he was.

He walked, therefore, with steady step to the spring, pressed it, and placed himself upon the trap, which descended slowly and deposited him in the chamber of furs.

As he passed the sofa, he brushed against the scarf which had fallen from Lorenza's shoulders when the pitiless old man, impassible as death itself, had carried her off in his arms.

This contact, more living seemingly than Lorenza herself, sent an icy shudder through Balsamo's veins. He took the scarf and kissed it, using it to stifle the cries which burst from his heaving breast.

Then he proceeded to open the door of the staircase.

On the topmost steps stood Fritz, all pale and breathless, holding a torch in one hand, and in the other the cord of the bell, which, in his terror and impatience, he continued to pull convulsively. On seeing his master, he uttered a cry of satisfaction, followed by one of surprise and fear. But Balsamo, ignorant of the cause of this double cry, replied only by a mute interrogation.

Fritz did not speak, but he ventured—he, usually so respectful—to take his master's hand, and led him to the large Venetian mirror that ornamented the mantelpiece at the back of which was the passage into Lorenza's apartment.

"Oh ! look, your excellency," said he, showing him his own image in the glass.

Balsamo shuddered. Then a smile—one of those deadly smiles which spring from infinite and incurable grief—flitted over his lips. He had understood the cause of Fritz's alarm.

Balsamo had grown twenty years older in an hour. There was no more brightness in his eyes, no more colour in his cheek ; an expression of dulness and stupefaction overspread his features ; a bloody foam fringed his lips ; a large spot of blood stained the whiteness of his cambric shirt,

Balsamo looked at himself in the glass for a moment without being able to recognise himself, then he determinedly fixed his eyes upon the strange person reflected in the mirror.

"Yes, Fritz," said he, "you are right."

Then, remarking the anxious look of his faithful servant:

"But why did you call me?" inquired he.

"Oh! master, for *them*."

"For them?"

"Yes."

"Whom do you mean by *them*?"

"Excellency," whispered Fritz, putting his mouth close to his master's ear, "the FIVE MASTERS."

Balsamo shuddered.

"All?" asked he.

"Yes, all."

"And they are here?"

"Here."

"Alone?"

"No; each has an armed servant waiting in the court-yard."

"They came together?"

"Yes, master, together, and they were getting impatient; that is why I rang so many times and so violently."

Balsamo, without even concealing the spot of blood beneath the folds of his frill, without attempting to repair the disorder of his dress, began to descend the stairs, after having asked Fritz if his guests had installed themselves in the salon or in the large study.

"In the salon, excellency," replied Fritz, following his master.

Then at the foot of the stairs, venturing to stop Balsamo, he asked:

"Has your excellency no orders to give me?"

"None, Fritz."

"Excellency——" stammered Fritz.

"Well?" asked Balsamo, with infinite gentleness.

"Will your excellency go unarmed?"

"Unarmed? yes."

"Even without your sword?"

"And why should I take my sword, Fritz?"

"I do not know," said the faithful servant, casting down his eyes, "but I thought—I believed—I feared——"

"It is well, Fritz—you may go."

Fritz moved away a few steps in obedience to the order he had received, but returned.

"Did you not hear?" asked Balsamo.

"Excellency, I merely wished to tell you that your double-barrelled pistols are in the ebony case upon the gilt stand."

"Go, I tell you!" replied Balsamo.

And he entered the salon.

CHAPTER CXXX.

THE JUDGMENT.

FRITZ was quite right; Balsamo's guests had not entered the Rue Saint Claude with a pacific display nor with a benevolent exterior.

Five horsemen escorted the travelling carriage in which the masters had come; five men with a haughty and sombre mien, armed to the teeth, had closed the outer gate and were guarding it whilst appearing to await their masters' return.

A coachman and two footmen on the carriage seat concealed under their overcoats each a small hanger and a musket. It had much more the air of a warlike expedition than a peaceful visit, these people's appearance in the Rue Saint Claude.

It was for this reason that the nocturnal invasion of these terrible men, the forcible taking possession of the hotel, had inspired the German with an unspeakable terror. He had at first attempted to refuse entrance to the whole party, when he had seen the escort through the wicket, and had suspected them to be armed; but the all-powerful signals they had used—that irresistible testimony of the right of the new-comers—had left him no option. Scarcely were they masters of the place, than the strangers, like skilful generals, posted themselves at each outlet of the house, taking no pains to dissemble their hostile intentions.

The pretended valets in the court-yard and in the passages, the pretended masters in the salon, seemed to Fritz to bode no good; therefore he had broken the bell.

Balsamo, without displaying any astonishment, without making any preparation, entered the room, which Fritz had lighted up in honour of these, as it was his duty to do towards all guests who visited the house.

His five visitors were seated upon chairs around the room, but not one rose when he appeared.

He, as master of the house, having looked at them, bowed politely; then only did they rise and gravely return his salute.

Balsamo took a chair in front of them, without noticing or seeming to notice the strange order of their position. In fact, the five arm-chairs formed a semicircle like to those of the ancient tribunals, with a president, supported by two assessors, and with Balsamo's chair placed in front of that of the president, and occupying the place accorded to the accused in a council or prætorium.

Balsamo did not speak first, as in other circumstances he would have done; he looked around without seeing any object clearly—still affected by a kind of painful drowsiness, which had remained after the shock.

"It seems, brother, that you have understood our errand," said the president, or rather he who occupied the centre seat; "yet you delayed to come, and we were already deliberating if we should send to seek you."

"I do not understand your errand," said Balsamo calmly.

"I should not have imagined so, from seeing you take the position and attitude of an accused before us."

"An accused?" stammered Balsamo vacantly, shrugging his shoulders. "I do not understand you."

"We will soon make you understand us. Not a difficult task, if I may believe your pale cheeks, your vacant eyes, and trembling voice. One would think you did not hear."

"Oh, yes, I hear," replied Balsamo, shaking his head, as if to banish the thoughts which oppressed it.

"Do you remember, brother," continued the president, "that in its last communication the superior committee warned you against a treasonable attempt meditated by one of the great ones of the order?"

"Perhaps so—yes—I do not deny it."

"You reply as a disordered and troubled conscience might be expected to do; but rouse yourself—be not cast down—reply with that clearness and precision which your terrible position requires. Reply to my questions with the certainty that we are open to conviction, for we have neither prejudice nor hatred in this matter. We are the law; it does not pronounce a verdict until the evidence is heard."

Balsamo made no reply.

"I repeat it, Balsamo, and my warning once given, let it be to you like the warning which combatants give to each other before commencing their struggle. I will attack you with just but powerful weapons; defend yourself!"

The assistants, seeing Balsamo's indifference and imperturbable demeanour, looked at each other with astonishment, and then again turned their eyes upon the president.

"You have heard me, Balsamo, have you not?" repeated the latter.

Balsamo made a sign of the head in the affirmative.

"Like a well-meaning and loyal brother, I have warned you, and given you a hint of the aim of my questionings. You are warned, guard yourself; I am about to commence again.

"After this announcement," continued the president, "the association appointed five of its members to watch in Paris the proceedings of the man who was pointed out to us as a traitor. Now, our revelations are not subject to error. We gather them, as you yourself know, either from devoted agents, from the aspect of events, or from infallible symptoms and signs among the mysterious combinations which nature has as yet revealed to us alone. Now one of us had a vision respecting you; we know that he has never been deceived, we were upon our guard, and watched you."

Balsamo listened without giving the least sign of impatience or even of intelligence. The president continued:

"It was not an easy task to watch a man such as you. You enter everywhere; your mission is to have a footing wherever our enemies have a residence or any power whatever. You have at your disposal all your natural resources—which are immense—and which the association entrusts to you to make its cause triumphant. For a long time we hovered in a sea of doubt when we saw enemies visit you, such as a Richelieu, a Dubarry, a Rohan. Moreover, at the last assembly in the Rue Plâtrière, you made a long speech full of clever paradoxes, which led us to imagine that you were playing a part in flattering and associating with this incorrigible race, which it is our duty to exterminate from the face of the earth. For a long time we respected the mystery of your behaviour, hoping for a happy result; but at last the illusion was dispelled."

Balsamo never stirred, and his features were fixed and motionless, insomuch that the president became impatient.

"Three days ago," said he, "five *lettres-de-cachet* were issued. They had been demanded from the king by M. de Sartines; they were filled as

soon as signed; and the same day were presented to five of our principal agents, our most faithful and devoted brothers, residing in Paris. All five were arrested: two were taken to the Bastille, where they are kept in the most profound secrecy; two are at Vincennes, in the *oubliette;* one in the most noisome cell in Bicetre. Did you know this circumstance?"

"No," said Balsamo.

"That is strange, after what we know of your relations with the lofty ones of the kingdom; but there is something stranger still."

Balsamo listened.

"To enable M. de Sartines to arrest these five faithful friends, he must have had the only paper which contains the names of the victims in his possession. This paper was sent to you by the supreme council in 1769; and to you it was assigned to receive the new members, and immediately invest them with the rank which the supreme council assigned them."

Balsamo expressed by a gesture that he did not recollect the circumstance.

"I shall assist your memory. The five persons in question were represented by five Arabic characters; and these characters, in the paper you received, corresponded with the names and initials of the new brothers."

"Be it so," said Balsamo.

"You acknowledge it?"

"I acknowledge whatever you please."

The president looked at his assessors, as if to order them to take a note of this confession.

"Well," continued he, "on this paper—the only one, remember, which could have compromised the brothers—there was a sixth name. Do you remember it?"

Balsamo made no reply.

"The name was—*the Count de Fenix.*"

"Agreed," said Balsamo.

"Then why—if the names of the five brothers figured in five *lettres-de-cachet*—why was yours respected, caressed, and favourably received at court and in the antechambers of ministers? If our brothers merited prison, you merited it also. What have you to reply?"

"Nothing."

"Ah! I can guess your objection. You may say that the police had by private means discovered the names of the obscurer brethren, but that it was obliged to respect yours as an ambassador and a powerful man. You may even say that they did not suspect this name."

"I shall say nothing."

"Your pride outlives your honour. These names the police could only have discovered by reading the confidential note which the supreme council had sent you; and this is the way it was seen. You kept it in a coffer. Is that true?"

"It is."

"One day a woman left your house carrying the coffer under her arm. She was seen by our agents, and followed to the hotel of the lieutenant of police, in the Faubourg St. Germain. We might have arrested the evil at its source; for if we had stopped the woman and taken the coffer from her, everything would have been safe and sure. But we obeyed the rules of our constitution, which command us to respect the secret means by which some members serve the cause, even when these means have the appearance of treason or imprudence."

Balsamo seemed to approve of this assertion, but with a gesture so

little marked, that, had it not been for his previous immobility, it would have been unnoticed.

"This woman reached the lieutenant of police," said the president; "she gave him the coffer, and all was discovered. Is this true?"

"Perfectly true."

The president rose.

"Who was this woman?" he exclaimed—"beautiful, impassioned, devotedly attached to you body and soul, tenderly loved by you—as spiritual as subtle—as cunning as one of the angels of darkness who assist man to commit evil! Lorenza Feliciani is the woman, Balsamo!"

Balsamo uttered a groan of despair.

"You are convicted," said the president.

"Have it so," replied Balsamo.

"I have not yet finished. A quarter of an hour after she had entered the hotel of the lieutenant of police, you arrived. She had sown the treason—you came to reap the reward. The obedient servant had taken upon herself the perpetration of the crime—you came to add the finishing stroke to the infamous work. Lorenza departed alone. You renounced her, doubtless, and would not compromise yourself by accompanying her; you left triumphantly along with Madame Dubarry, summoned there to receive from your own lips the information you sold her. You entered her carriage, as the boatman entered the boat with the sinner, Mary the Egyptian. You left behind the papers which ruined us with M. de Sartines, but you brought away the coffer which might have ruined you with us. Fortunately we saw you—God's light is with us when we need it most."

Balsamo bowed without speaking.

"I now conclude," added the president. "Two criminals have been pointed out to the order; a woman, your accomplice, who may be innocent perhaps, but who, in point of fact, has injured our cause by revealing one of our secrets; and you, the master, the Great Copht, the enlightened mind, who have had the cowardice to shelter yourself behind this woman, that your treason may be less clearly seen."

Balsamo raised his head, and fixed a look upon the commissioners, burning with all the rage which had smouldered in his breast since the commencement of the interrogation.

"Why do you accuse this woman?" asked he.

"Ah! we know that you will endeavour to defend her; we know that you love her almost to idolatry—that you prefer her to everything in the world. We know that she is your treasure of science, of happiness, and of fortune; we know that she is more precious to you than all the world beside."

"You know all this?" said Balsamo.

"Yes, we know it; and we shall punish you through her more than through yourself."

"Finish!"

The president rose.

"This is the sentence:

"Joseph Balsamo is a traitor—he has broken his oath; but his knowledge is immense, and he is useful to the order. Balsamo must live for the cause he has betrayed. He belongs to his brothers, though he has cast them off."

"Ha!" said Balsamo, gloomily, almost savagely.

"A perpetual prison will protect the association against any renewal of his treachery, at the same time that it will permit the brothers to gather

the knowledge from him which it has a right to expect from all its members.

"As to Lorenza Feliciani, a terrible punishment——"

"Hold!" said Balsamo, with perfect calmness in his voice, "you forget that I did not defend myself—the accused must be heard in his own justification. A word, a single proof, will suffice; wait one moment, and I will bring you the proof I have promised."

The commissaries seemed to deliberate for a moment.

"Ah! you fear lest I should kill myself," said Balsamo with a bitter smile. "If that had been my wish, it would have been already done. There is that in this ring which would kill you all five times over had I opened it. You fear I should escape; let me be guarded if you wish it."

"Go!" said the president.

Balsamo disappeared for about a moment. Then he was heard heavily descending the staircase. He entered, bearing the cold, rigid, and discoloured body of Lorenza upon his shoulder, her white hand hanging to the ground.

"Here is the woman I adored, who was my treasure, my only happiness, my life!—the woman who, as you say, has betrayed you—here, take her! God did not wait for you to punish, gentlemen!"

And with a movement quick as lightning, he let the corpse glide from his arms, and sent it rolling on the carpet to the feet of the judges, whom her cold hair and the dead and motionless hands touched, to their great horror, while by the light of the lamps they saw the wide gash gaping in her neck, white as a swan's.

"Now pronounce the sentence," added Balsamo.

The horrified judges uttered a cry, and, seized with maddening terror, fled in indescribable confusion. Soon their horses were heard neighing and trampling in the court-yard; the outer gate grated on its hinges; and then silence, the solemn silence of the tomb, returned to seat itself beside despair and death.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

DOOM.

WHILE the terrible scene which we have just described was taking place between Balsamo and the Five Masters, nothing apparently had changed in the rest of the house. The old man had seen Balsamo enter his apartment and bear away Lorenza's corpse, and this new demonstration had recalled him to what was passing around him.

But when he saw Balsamo take up the dead body and descend with it into the lower rooms, he fancied it was the last and eternal adieu of this man whose heart he had broken, and fear descended on his soul with an overwhelming force, which, for him who had done all to avoid death, doubled the horror of the grave.

Not knowing for what purpose Balsamo had left him, nor whither he was going, he began to call out:

"Acharat! Acharat!"

It was the name his pupil had borne in childhood, and he hoped it would have retained its influence over the man.

But Balsamo continued to descend. Having touched the ground, he even forgot to make the trap reascend, and disappeared in the corridor.

"Ah!" cried Althotas, "see what man is—a blind, ungrateful animal! Return, Acharat, return! Ah! you prefer the ridiculous object called a woman to the perfection of humanity which I represent! You prefer a fragment of life to immortality!

"But no!" he exclaimed after a moment's pause; "the wretch has deceived his master—he has betrayed my confidence like a vile robber; he feared that I should live because I surpass him so much in science; he wanted to inherit the laborious work I had nearly concluded; he laid a trap for me, his master and benefactor! Oh, Acharat!"

And gradually the old man's anger was aroused, his cheeks were dyed with a hectic tinge, his half-closed eyes seemed to glow with the gloomy brightness of those phosphorescent lights which sacrilegious children place in the cavities of a human skull. Then he cried:

"Return, Acharat, return! Look to yourself! You know that I have conjurations which evoke fire and raise up supernatural spirits! I have evoked Satan—him whom the magi called Phegor, in the mountains of Gad—and Satan was forced to leave his bottomless pit and appear before me! I have conferred with the seven angels who ministered to God's anger upon the same mountain where Moses received the ten commandments! By my will alone I have kindled the great tripod with its seven flames which Trajan stole from the Jews! Take care, Acharat, take care!"

But there was no reply.

Then his brain became more and more clouded.

"Do you not see, wretch," said he, in a choking voice, "that death is about to seize me as it would the meanest mortal? Listen, Acharat! you may return; I will do you no harm. Return: I renounce the fire; you need not fear the evil spirit, nor the seven avenging angels. I renounce vengeance, and yet I could strike you with such terror that you would become an idiot and cold as marble, for I can stop the circulation of the blood. Come back, then, Acharat; I will do you no harm, but, on the contrary, I can do you much good. Acharat, instead of abandoning me, watch over my life, and you shall have all my treasures and all my secrets. Let me live, Acharat, that I may teach them to you. See, see!"

And with gleaming eyes and trembling fingers he pointed to the numerous objects, papers, and rolls scattered through the vast apartment. Then he waited, collecting all his fast-failing faculties to listen.

"Ah, you come not!" he cried. "You think I shall die thus, and by this murder—for you are murdering me—everything will belong to you. Madman! were you even capable of reading the manuscripts which I alone am able to decipher—were the spirit even to grant you my wisdom for a lifetime of one, two, or three centuries, to make use of the materials I have gathered—you shall not inherit them! No, no, a thousand times no! Return, Acharat, return for a moment, were it only to behold the ruin of this whole house—were it only to contemplate the beautiful spectacle I am preparing for you! Acharat! Acharat! Acharat!"

There was no answer, for Balsamo was during this time replying to the

accusation of the Five Masters by showing them the mutilated body of Lorenza. The cries of the deserted old man grew louder and louder; despair redoubled his strength, and his hoarse yellings, reverberating in the long corridors, spread terror afar, like the roaring of a tiger who has broken his chain or forced the bars of his cage.

"Ah, you do not come!" shrieked Althotas; "you despise me! you calculate upon my weakness! Well, you shall see! Fire! fire! fire!"

He articulated these cries with such vehemence that Balsamo, now freed from his terrified visitors, was roused by them from the depth of his despair. He took Lorenza's corpse in his arms, reascended the staircase, laid the dead body upon the sofa where two hours previously it had reposed in sleep, and, mounting upon the trap, he suddenly appeared before Althotas.

"Ah! at last!" cried the old man, with savage joy. "You were afraid! you saw I could revenge myself, and you came! You did well to come, for in another moment I should have set this chamber on fire!"

Balsamo looked at him, shrugged his shoulders slightly, but did not deign to reply.

"I am athirst!" cried Althotas, "I am athirst! Give me drink, Acharat!"

Balsamo made no reply; he did not move; he looked at the dying man as if he would not lose an atom of his agony.

"Do you hear me?" howled Althotas; "do you hear me?"

The same silence, the same immobility on the part of the gloomy spectator.

"Do you hear me, Acharat?" vociferated the old man, almost tearing his throat in his efforts to give emphasis to this last burst of rage; "water! give me water!"

Althotas's features were rapidly decomposing.

There was no longer fire in his looks, but only an unearthly glare; the blood no longer coursed beneath his sunken and cadaverous cheek; motion and life were almost dead within him. His long sinewy arms, in which he had carried Lorenza like a child, were raised, but inert and powerless as the membranes of a polypus. His fury had worn out the feeble spark which despair had for a moment revived in him.

"Ah!" said he, "ah! you think I do not die quickly enough! You mean to make me die of thirst! You gloat over my treasures and my manuscripts with longing eyes! Ah! you think you have them already! Wait, wait!"

And, with an expiring effort, Althotas took a small bottle from beneath the cushions of the arm-chair and uncorked it. At the contact with the air, a liquid flame burst from the glass vessel, and Althotas, like some potent magician, shook this flame around him.

Instantly the manuscripts piled round the old man's arm-chair, the books scattered over the room, the rolls of paper disinterred with so much trouble from the pyramids of Cheops and the subterranean depths of Herculaneum, took fire with the rapidity of gunpowder. A sheet of flame overspread the marble slab, and seemed to Balsamo's eyes like one of those flaming circles of hell of which Dante sings.

Althotas no doubt expected that Balsamo would rush amidst the flames to save this valuable inheritance which the old man was annihilating along with himself, but he was mistaken. Balsamo did not stir, but stood calm and isolated upon the trap-door, so that the fire could not reach him.

The flames wrapped Althotas in their embrace, but, instead of terrifying

him, it seemed as if the old man found himself once more in his proper element, and that, like the salamanders sculptured on our ancient castles, the fire caressed instead of consuming him.

Balsamo still stood gazing at him. The fire had reached the woodwork, and completely surrounded the old man; it roared around the feet of the massive oaken chair on which he was seated, and, what was most strange, though it was already consuming the lower part of his body, he did not seem to feel it.

On the contrary, at the contact with the seemingly purifying element the dying man's muscles seemed gradually to distend, and an indescribable serenity overspread his features like a mask. Isolated from his body at this last hour, the old prophet on his car of fire seemed ready to wing his way aloft. The mind, all-powerful in its last moments, forgot its attendant matter, and, sure of having nothing more to expect below, it stretched ardently upwards to those higher spheres to which the fire seemed to bear it.

At this instant Althotas' eyes, which at the first reflection of the flames seemed to have been re-endowed with life, gazed vaguely and abstractedly at some point in space which was neither heaven nor earth. They looked as if they would pierce the horizon, calm and resigned, analysing all sensation, listening to all pain, while, with his last breath on earth, the old magician muttered, in a hollow voice, his adieus to power, to life, and hope.

"Ah!" said he, "I die without regret. I have possessed everything on earth, and have known all; I have had all power which is granted to a human creature; I had almost reached immortality!"

Balsamo uttered a sardonic laugh, whose gloomy echo arrested the old man's attention. Through the flames which surrounded him as with a veil, he cast a look of savage majesty upon his pupil.

"You are right," said he; "one thing I had not foreseen—God!"

Then, as if this mighty word had uprooted his whole soul, Althotas fell back upon his chair. He had given up to God the last breath, which he had hoped to wrest from him.

Balsamo heaved a sigh, and, without endeavouring to save anything from the precious pile upon which this second Zoroaster had stretched himself to die, he again descended to Lorenza, and touched the spring of the trap, which readjusted itself in the ceiling, veiling from his sight the immense furnace, which roared like the crater of a volcano.

During the whole night the fire roared above Balsamo's head like a whirlwind, without his making an effort either to extinguish it or to fly. Stretched beside Lorenza's body, he was insensible to all danger; but, contrary to his expectations, when the fire had devoured all, and laid bare the vaulted walls of stone, annihilating all the valuable contents, it extinguished itself, and Balsamo heard its last howlings, which, like those of Althotas, gradually died away in plaints and sighs.

o o o o o o

[After the spirit-stirring scenes just narrated, in which the principal personages of the tale vanish from the stage, we have thought it better to hurry over the succeeding chapters, in which the book is brought to an end, merely giving the reader the following succinct account of their contents, as the effect of them when read at full length has been on ourselves, and we doubt not would be on the public, to detract from and weaken the

interest which was wound up to so high a pitch by the preceding portion of the narrative.—EDITOR.]

From the deathlike lethargy into which Andrée had been plunged by Balsamo's neglect to arouse her from the magnetic sleep, she at length recovered, but so utterly prostrate both in mind and body, as to be wholly unfit for the performance of her duties at court. She therefore asked for, and obtained from the dauphiness, permission to retire into a convent, and the kindness of her royal mistress procured for her admission amongst the Carmelite sisters of St. Denis, presided over by Madame Louise of France, whom we have already met in these pages.

This, it may readily be imagined, gave a death-blow both to the unrighteous hopes of the Baron de Taverney, her father, and to the noble aspirations of her brother Philip. Frowned upon by the king, and the scoff of the sycophantic courtiers, amongst the foremost of whom was his old friend, the Duke de Richelieu, Taverney—after a stormy interview with his son, whom he disowned and cast off to seek his fortunes where he best might—slunk back, despair and every evil passion boiling within his breast, to his patrimonial den, where, it is to be presumed, he found amidst his misfortunes such consolation from his exalted philosophy as it was well calculated to afford.

Philip, heart-broken by his sister's sufferings and the malicious whispers of the corrupt court, decided upon sailing for America, at that time the land of promise for ardent admirers and followers of liberty. His example was imitated by Gilbert, who had now also nothing to detain him in France, where his high-flown and romantic hopes were for ever blasted, and they both took shipping in the same vessel from Havre.

Of Balsamo little more is said, and that little does not enlighten us as to his future fate. Weakened both in bodily health and in his influence over the secret brotherhood, he vegetated rather than lived in his mansion of the Rue St. Claude, to reappear, it is presumed, amidst the stormy scenes of the FRENCH REVOLUTION.

Having thus given a rapid résumé of the intermediate events, we come at once to the

EPILOGUE.

THE NINTH OF MAY.

ON the ninth of May, 1774, at eight o'clock in the evening, Versailles presented a most curious and interesting spectacle.

From the first day of the month the king, Louis XV., attacked with a malady the serious nature of which his physicians at first dared not confess to him, kept his couch, and now began anxiously to consult the countenances of those who surrounded him, to discover in them some reflection of the truth or some ray of hope.

The physician Bordeu had pronounced the king suffering from an attack of small-pox of the most malignant nature, and the physician La Martinière, who had agreed with his colleague as to the nature of the king's complaint, gave it as his opinion that his majesty should be informed of the real state of the case, "in order that, both spiritually and temporally, as a king and

as a Christian, he should take measures for his own safety and that of his kingdom."

"His most Christian majesty," said he, "should have extreme unction administered to him."

La Martinière represented the party of the dauphin—the opposition. Bordeu asserted that the bare mention of the serious nature of the disease would kill the king, and said that for his part he would not be a party to such regicide.

Bordeu represented Madame Dubarry's party.

In fact, to call in the aid of the Church to the king was to expel the favourite. When religion enters at one door, it is full time for Satan to make his exit by the other.

In the meantime, during all these intestine divisions of the faculty, of the royal family, and of the different parties of the court, the disease took quiet possession of the aged, corrupt, and worn-out frame of the king, and set up such a strong position, that neither remedies nor prescriptions could dislodge it.

From the first symptoms of the attack, Louis beheld his couch surrounded by his two daughters, the favourite, and the courtiers whom he especially delighted to honour. They still laughed and stood firm by each other.

All at once the austere and ominous countenance of Madame Louise of France appeared at Versailles. She had quitted her cell to give to her father, in her turn, the cares and consolations he so much required.

She entered, pale and stern as a statue of Fate. She was no longer a daughter to a father, a sister to her fellow-sisters; she rather resembled those ancient prophetesses who in the evil day of adversity poured in the startled ears of kings the boding cry, "Woe! Woe! Woe!"

She fell upon Versailles like a thunder-shock at the very hour when it was Madame Dubarry's custom to visit the king, who kissed her white hands, and pressed them like some healing medicament to his aching brow and burning cheeks.

At her sight all fled. The sisters, trembling, sought refuge in a neighbouring apartment. Madame Dubarry bent the knee and hastened to those which she occupied: the privileged courtiers retreated in disorder to the antechambers; the two physicians alone remained standing by the fireside.

"My daughter!" murmured the king, opening his eyes, heavy with pain and fever.

"Yes, sire," said the princess, "your daughter."

"And you come——"

"To remind you of God!"

The king raised himself in an upright posture and attempted to smile.

"For you have forgotten God," resumed Madame Louise.

"I!"

"And I wish to recall him to your thoughts."

"My daughter! I am not so near death, I trust, that your exhortations need be so very urgent. My illness is very slight—a slow fever, attended with some inflammation."

"Your malady, sire," interrupted the princess, "is that which, according to etiquette, should summon around your majesty's couch all the great prelates of the kingdom. When a member of the royal family is attacked with small-pox, the rites of the Church should be administered without loss of time."

"Madame!" exclaimed the king, greatly agitated, and becoming deadly pale, "what is that you say?"

"Madame!" broke in the terrified physicians.

"I repeat," continued the princess, "that your majesty is attacked with the small-pox."

The king uttered a cry.

"The physicians did not tell me so," replied he.

"They had not the courage. But I look forward to another kingdom for your majesty than the kingdom of France. Draw near to God, sire, and solemnly review your past life."

"The small-pox!" muttered Louis; "a fatal disease!—Bordeu!—La Martinière!—can it be true?"

The two practitioners hung their heads.

"Then I am lost!" said the king, more and more terrified.

"All diseases can be cured, sire," said Bordeu, taking the initiative, "especially when the patient preserves his composure of mind."

"God gives peace to the mind and health to the body," replied the princess.

"Madame!" said Bordeu, boldly, although in a low voice, "you are killing the king!"

The princess deigned no reply. She approached the sick monarch, and taking his hand, which she covered with kisses:

"Break with the past, sire," said she, "and give an example to your people. No one warned you; you ran the risk of perishing eternally. Promise solemnly to live a Christian life if you are spared—die like a Christian, if God calls you hence!"

As she concluded, she imprinted a second kiss on the royal hand, and, with slow step took her way through the antechambers. There she let her long black veil fall over her face, descended the staircase with a grave and majestic air, and entered her carriage, leaving behind her a stupefaction and terror which cannot be described.

The king could not rouse his spirits, except by dint of questioning his physicians, who replied in terms of courtly flattery.

"I do not wish," said he, "that the scene of Metz with the Duchesse de Chateauroux should be re-enacted here. Send for Madame d'Aiguillon, and request her to take Madame Dubarry with her to Rueil."

This order was equivalent to an expulsion. Bordeu attempted to remonstrate, but the king ordered him to be silent. Bordeu, moreover, saw his colleague ready to report all that passed to the dauphin, and, well aware what would be the issue of the king's malady, he did not persist, but, quitting the royal chamber, he proceeded to acquaint Madame Dubarry with the blow which had just fallen on her fortunes.

The countess, terrified at the ominous and insulting expression which she saw already pictured on every face around her, hastened to withdraw. In an hour she was without the walls of Versailles, seated beside the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, who, like a trustworthy and grateful friend, was taking the disgraced favourite to her château of Rueil, which had descended to her from the great Richelieu.

Bordeu, on his side, shut the door of the king's chamber against all the royal family, under pretext of contagion. Louis's apartment was thenceforward walled up: no one might enter but Religion and Death.

The king had the last rites of the Church administered to him that same day, and this news soon spread through Paris, where the dis-

grace of the favourite was already known, and circulated from mouth to mouth.

All the court hastened to pay their respects to the dauphin, who closed his doors and refused to see any one.

But the following day the king was better, and sent the Duke d'Aiguillon to carry his compliments to Madame Dubarry. This day was the 9th May, 1774.

The court deserted the pavilion occupied by the dauphin, and flocked in such crowds to Rueil, where the favourite was residing, that since the banishment of M. de Choiseul to Chanteloup such a string of carriages had never been witnessed.

Things were in this position, therefore: would the king live, and Madame Dubarry still remain queen?—or would the king die, and Madame Dubarry sink to the condition of an infamous and execrable courtesan?

This was why Versailles, on the evening of the 9th May, in the year 1774, presented such a curious and interesting spectacle.

On the Place d'Armes, before the palace, several groups had formed in front of the railing, who, with sympathetic air, seemed most anxious to hear the news.

They were citizens of Versailles or Paris, and every now and then, with all the politeness imaginable, they questioned the gardes-du-corps, who were pacing slowly up and down the Court of Honour with their hands behind their backs, respecting the king's health.

Gradually these groups dispersed. The inhabitants of Paris took their seats in the *pataches* or stage-coaches to return peaceably to their own homes; whilst those of Versailles, sure of having the earliest news from the fountain-head, also retired to their several dwellings.

No one was to be seen in the streets but the patrols of the watch, who performed their duty a little more quietly than usual, and that gigantic world called the Palace of Versailles became by degrees shrouded in darkness and silence, like that greater world which contained it.

At the angle of the street bordered with trees which extends in front of the palace, a man advanced in years was seated on a stone bench overshadowed by the already leafy boughs of the horse-chestnuts, with his expressive and poetic features turned towards the château, leaning with both hands on his cane, and supporting his chin on his hands.

He was nevertheless an old man, bent by age and ill-health, but his eye still sparkled with something of its youthful fire, and his thoughts glowed even more brightly than his eyes.

He was absorbed in melancholy contemplation, and did not perceive a second personage who, after peeping curiously through the iron railing and questioning the gardes-du-corps, crossed the esplanade in a diagonal direction, and advanced straight towards the bench, with the intention of seating himself upon it.

This personage was a young man with projecting cheek-bones, low forehead, aquiline nose slightly bent to one side, and a sardonic smile. Whilst advancing towards the stone bench he chuckled sneeringly, although alone, seeming to reply by this manifestation to some secret thought.

When within three paces of the bench, he perceived the old man and paused, scanning him with his oblique and stealthy glance, although evidently fearing to let his purpose be seen.

"You are enjoying the fresh air, I presume, sir?" said he, approaching him with an abrupt movement.

The old man raised his head.

"Ha!" exclaimed the new-comer, "it is my illustrious master!"

"And you are my young practitioner?" said the old man.

"Will you permit me to take a seat beside you, sir?"

"Most willingly." And the old man made room on the bench beside him.

"It appears that the king is doing better?" said the young man. "The people rejoice." And he burst a second time into his sneering laugh.

The old man made no reply.

"The whole day long the carriages have been rolling from Paris to Rueil, and from Rueil to Versailles. The Countess Dubarry will marry the king as soon as his health is re-established!" And he burst into a louder laugh than before.

Again the old man made no reply.

"Pardon me if I laugh at fate," continued the young man, with a gesture of nervous impatience, "but every good Frenchman, look you, loves his king, and my king is better to-day."

"Do not jest thus on such a subject, sir," said the old man gently. "The death of a man is always a misfortune for some one, and the death of a king is frequently a great misfortune for all."

"Even the death of Louis XV.?" interrupted the young man, in a tone of irony. "Oh, my dear master, a distinguished philosopher like you to sustain such a proposition! I know all the energy and skill of your paradoxes, but I cannot compliment you on this one."

The old man shook his head.

"And, besides," added the new-comer, "why think of the king's death? Who speaks of such an event? The king has the small-pox; well, we all know that complaint. The king has beside him Bordeu and La Martinière, who are skilful men. Oh, I will wager a trifle, my dear master, that Louis the Well-Beloved will escape this turn! Only this time the French people do not suffocate themselves in churches putting up vows for him, as on the occasion of his former illness. Mark me, everything grows antiquated and is abandoned!"

"Silence!" said the old man, shuddering; "silence! for I tell you you are speaking of a man over whom at this moment the destroying angel of God hovers."

His young companion, surprised at this strange language, looked at the speaker, whose eyes had never quitted the façade of the château.

"Then you have more positive intelligence?" inquired he.

"Look!" said the old man, pointing with his finger to one of the windows of the palace; "what do you behold yonder?"

"A window lighted up—is that what you mean?"

"Yes; but lighted in what manner?"

"By a wax candle placed in a little lantern."

"Precisely."

"Well?"

"Well, young man, do you know what the flame of that wax-light represents?"

"No, sir."

"It represents the life of the king."

The young man looked more fixedly at his aged companion, as if to be certain that he was in his perfect senses.

"A friend of mine, M. de Jussieu," continued the old man, "has placed that wax-light there, which will burn as long as the king is alive."

"It is a signal, then?"

"A signal which Louis XV.'s successor devours with his eyes from behind some neighbouring curtain. This signal, which shall warn the ambitious of the dawn of a new reign, informs a poor philosopher like myself of the instant when the breath of the Almighty sweeps away, at the same moment, an age and a human existence."

The young man shuddered in his turn, and moved closer to his companion.

"Oh," said the aged philosopher, "mark well this night, young man! Behold what clouds and tempests it bears in its murky bosom! The morning which will succeed it I shall witness no doubt, for I am not yet old enough to abandon hope of seeing the morrow; but a reign will commence on that morrow which you will see to its close, and which contains mysteries which I cannot hope to be a spectator of. It is not, therefore, without interest that I watch yonder trembling flame, whose signification I have just explained to you."

"True, my master," murmured the young man, "most true."

"Louis XIV. reigned seventy-three years," continued the old man. "How many will Louis XVI. reign?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the younger of the two, pointing to the window, which had just become shrouded in darkness.

"The king is dead!" said the old man, rising with a sort of terror.

And both kept silence for some minutes.

Suddenly a chariot, drawn by eight fiery horses, started at full gallop from the courtyard of the palace. Two outriders preceded it, each holding a torch in his hand.

In the chariot were the dauphin, Marie Antoinette, and Madame Elizabeth, the sister of the king. The flame of the torches threw a gloomy light on their pale features. The carriage passed close to the two men, within ten paces of the bench from which they had risen.

"Long live King Louis XVI.! Long live the queen!" shouted the young man in a loud, harsh voice, as if he meant to insult this new-born majesty instead of saluting it.

The dauphin bowed; the queen showed her face at the window, sad and severe. The carriage dashed on and disappeared.

"My dear M. Rousseau," said the younger of the two spectators, "then is our friend Mademoiselle Dubarry a widow."

"To-morrow she will be exiled," said his aged companion. "Adieu, M. Marat!"

THE END.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD, SURREY.

ROUTLEDGE'S OCTAVO NOVELS.

Price 6s. each, handsomely bound in cloth.

GUY FAWKES. By W. H. AINSWORTH. With Illustrations on Steel by GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

JACK SHEPPARD. By W. H. AINSWORTH. With Illustrations on Steel by GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

ROOKWOOD. By W. H. AINSWORTH. With Illustrations by GEORGE CRUIKSHANK and Sir JOHN GILBERT, A.R.A.

THE STAR CHAMBER. By W. H. AINSWORTH. Illustrated by "PHIZ."

CRICHTON. By W. H. AINSWORTH. Illustrated by HABLOT K. BROWNE.

THE SPENDTHRIFT. By W. H. AINSWORTH. Illustrated by HABLOT K. BROWNE.

MERVYN CLITHEROE. By W. H. AINSWORTH. With Illustrations on Steel by H. K. BROWNE.

THE TOWER OF LONDON. By W. H. AINSWORTH. With Forty Illustrations on Steel and numerous Woodcuts by GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES. By W. H. AINSWORTH. With Illustrations by Sir JOHN GILBERT, A.R.A.

BOSCOBEL; OR, THE ROYAL OAK. By W. H. AINSWORTH. With Illustrations.

WINDSOR CASTLE. By W. H. AINSWORTH. With Portrait of the Author, and Eighteen Illustrations by GEORGE CRUIKSHANK and TONY JOHANNOT. Numerous Woodcuts.

OLD ST. PAUL'S: A Tale of the Plague and the Fire. By W. H. AINSWORTH. With Twenty Illustrations on Steel by J. FRANKLIN and H. K. BROWNE.

THE MISER'S DAUGHTER. By W. H. AINSWORTH. With Twenty Steel Plates by GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

OVINGDEAN GRANGE. Illustrated by "PHIZ."

HARRY COVERDALE'S COURTSHIP, AND WHAT CAME OF IT. By FRANK SMEDLEY. Thirty Illustrations on Steel by "PHIZ."

LEWIS ARUNDEL. By F. SMEDLEY. With Forty-two Illustrations by "PHIZ."

FRANK FAIRLEGH: Scenes from the Life of a Private Pupil. By FRANK SMEDLEY. With Thirty Illustrations on Steel by GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

HANDY ANDY. By SAMUEL LOVER. With Twenty-four Illustrations by the Author.

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO. By ALEXANDRE DUMAS. With Twenty full-page Illustrations and a Portrait of the Author.

CONFESSIONS OF CON CREGAN, the Irish Gil Blas. By CHARLES LEVER. With Illustrations on Steel and numerous Woodcuts by "PHIZ."

THE FORTUNES OF COLONEL TORLOGH O'BRIEN. A Tale of the Wars of King James. By LE FANU. With Illustrations by HABLOT K. BROWNE.

VALENTINE VOX. By HENRY COCKTON. With Illustrations on Steel.

THE FLITCH OF BACON. By W. H. AINSWORTH. Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, A.R.A.

NOTRE DAME. By VICTOR HUGO. With 36 full-page Illustrations.

AURIOL. By W. HARRISON AINSWORTH. With Illustrations on Steel by "PHIZ."

LONDON AND NEW YORK: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS.

Uniform with the "HARRY LORREQUER" *Edition of* LEVER'S *Novels.*

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

A New Edition of the Waverley Novels.

Printed in crown 8vo., uniform with the Knebworth Edition of Lord LYTTON'S Novels, containing the AUTHOR'S NOTES, and illustrated with Steel Plates from designs by GEORGE CRUIKSHANK, TURNER, MACLISE, and other celebrated Artists.

Price 3s. 6d. each, cloth gilt.

WAVERLEY.
GUY MANNERING.
OLD MORTALITY.
THE HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN.
ROB ROY.
THE ANTIQUARY.
THE BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR.
THE BLACK DWARF, AND A LEGEND OF MONTROSE.
IVANHOE.
THE MONASTERY.
THE ABBOT.
KENILWORTH.
THE PIRATE.
THE FORTUNES OF NIGEL.
PEVERIL OF THE PEAK.
QUENTIN DURWARD.
ST. RONAN'S WELL.
REDGAUNTLET.
THE BETROTHED, AND THE HIGHLAND WIDOW.
THE TALISMAN.
WOODSTOCK.
THE SURGEON'S DAUGHTER, AND CASTLE DANGEROUS.
COUNT ROBERT OF PARIS.
THE FAIR MAID OF PERTH.
ANNE OF GEIERSTEIN.

LONDON AND NEW YORK: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS.

Uniform with the "HARRY LORREQUER" *Edition of* LEVER'S *Novels.*

CAPTAIN MARRYAT.

An entirely New Edition of the Works of Captain MARRYAT, in Monthly Volumes, crown 8vo., bound in blue cloth, price 3*s.* 6*d.* each; printed from entirely New Type, with Six Original Illustrations by the best Artists.

PETER SIMPLE.
THE KING'S OWN.
FRANK MILDMAY.
MIDSHIPMAN EASY.
JACOB FAITHFUL.
THE DOG FIEND.
RATTLIN THE REEFER.
PERCIVAL KEENE.
JAPHET IN SEARCH OF A FATHER.
NEWTON FORSTER.
OLLA PODRIDA.
THE POACHER.
PACHA OF MANY TALES.
VALERIE.
THE PHANTOM SHIP.
MONSIEUR VIOLET.

The Set Complete, 16 *Vols., half roan,* £3 3*s.*

FIELDING & SMOLLETT.

A New Edition of the Novels of these Standard Authors in 3*s.* 6*d.* Volumes, printed in crown 8vo. size, bound in brown cloth, each Volume averaging about 400 pages, and containing Eight Illustrations by PHIZ.

BY HENRY FIELDING.

TOM JONES.
JOSEPH ANDREWS.
AMELIA.

BY T. SMOLLETT.

HUMPHRY CLINKER.
PEREGRINE PICKLE.
RODERICK RANDOM.

LONDON AND NEW YORK: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS.

The "Harry Lorrequer" Edition.

OF

CHARLES LEVER'S NOVELS.

Price 3s. 6d. each volume, with Illustrations.

HARRY LORREQUER.
JACK HINTON.
CHARLES O'MALLEY (2 vols.).
ARTHUR O'LEARY.
TOM BURKE (2 vols.).
THE O'DONOGHUE.
THE KNIGHT OF GWYNNE (2 vols.).
ROLAND CASHEL (2 vols.).
THE DALTONS (2 vols.)
THE DODD FAMILY ABROAD (2 vols.).
SIR JASPER CAREW.
MAURICE TIERNAY.
CON CREGAN.
THE FORTUNES OF GLENCORE.
DAVENPORT DUNN (2 vols.).
THE MARTINS O' CRO MARTIN (2 vols.).
ONE OF THEM.
BARRINGTON.
A DAY'S RIDE.
LUTTRELL OF ARRAN.
TONY BUTLER.
SIR BROOKE FOSBROOKE.
THE BRAMLEIGHS.
THAT BOY OF NORCOTT'S.
LORD KILGOBBIN.

LONDON AND NEW YORK: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS.

The New Library Edition

OF

LORD LYTTON'S NOVELS.

MESSRS. GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS beg to announce they are now issuing an ENTIRELY NEW LIBRARY EDITION of LORD LYTTON'S NOVELS in Monthly Volumes, price 7*s.* 6*d.* each.

This New Edition is printed in demy 8vo. by CLAY, from new type, and will contain

ALL THE NOVELS OF LORD LYTTON,

FORMING THE

ONLY COMPLETE LIBRARY EDITION

Ever issued of the Novels of this famous Author.

VOLUMES ALREADY PUBLISHED.

PELHAM.
PAUL CLIFFORD.
EUGENE ARAM.
LAST DAYS OF POMPEII.
RIENZI.
THE LAST OF THE BARONS.
ERNEST MALTRAVERS.
ALICE.
GODOLPHIN.
THE DISOWNED.
LEILA; AND THE PILGRIMS OF THE RHINE.
NIGHT AND MORNING.
DEVEREUX.
THE CAXTONS.
MY NOVEL, VOL. I.
MY NOVEL, VOL. II.
LUCRETIA.
HAROLD.

LONDON AND NEW YORK: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS.

The Old Dramatists and the Old Poets.

WITH BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS, &c.

These Volumes are beautifully printed on fine paper, with Steel Portraits and Vignettes and are each, with one exception, complete in ONE VOLUME.

THE OLD DRAMATISTS.

SHAKSPEARE. With remarks on his Life and Writings by THOMAS CAMPBELL; and Portrait, Vignette, Illustrations, and Index. In One Vol., 8vo., price 10*s.* 6*d.* cloth.

WYCHERLEY, CONGREVE, VANBRUGH, AND FARQUHAR. With Biographical and Critical Notices by LEIGH HUNT; and Portrait and Vignette. In One Vol., 8vo., price 16*s.* each.

MASSINGER AND FORD. With an Introduction by HARTLEY COLERIDGE; and Portrait and Vignette. In One Vol., price 16*s.* cloth.

BEN JONSON. With a Memoir by WILLIAM GIFFORD; and Portrait and Vignette. In One Vol., 8vo., 16*s.* cloth.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER. With Introduction by GEORGE DARLEY; and Portrait and Vignettes. In Two Vols., 8vo., price £1 12*s.* cloth.

JOHN WEBSTER. With Life and Notes by the Rev. ALEXANDER DYCE. In One Vol., 8vo., price 12*s.* cloth.

MARLOWE. With a Memoir and Notes by the Rev. ALEXANDER DYCE; and Portrait and Vignette. In One Vol., 8vo., price 12*s.* cloth.

PEEL AND GREEN'S DRAMATIC WORKS. Edited by the Rev. ALEXANDER DYCE. In One Vol., 8vo., price 16*s.* cloth.

THE OLD POETS.

SPENCER. With Selected Notes, Life by the Rev. H. J. TODD, M.A., Portrait, Vignette, and Glossary Index. In One Vol., price 10*s.* 6*d.* cloth.

CHAUCER. With Notes and Glossary by TYRWHITT; and Portrait and Vignette. In One Vol., price 10*s.* 6*d.* cloth.

DRYDEN. With Notes by the Revs. JOSEPH and JOHN WARTON; and Portrait and Vignette. In One Vol., price 10*s.* 6*d.* cloth.

POPE. Including the Translations. With Notes and Life by Rev. H. F. CARY, A.M.; and Portrait and Vignette. In One Vol. price 10*s.* 6*d.* cloth.

LONDON AND NEW YORK: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS.

NOTICES DOES NOT EXEMPT THE BORROWER FROM OVERDUE FEES.

WIDENER
BOOK DUE
JUL 6 - 1984

WIDENER
BOOK DUE
NOV 13 1985

CANCELLED
JUN 26 1984